

**Lords of the Silk Route:
Violent Non-State Actors in Central
Asia**

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FOREWORD

We are pleased to publish this forty-third volume in the *Occasional Paper* series of the United States Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). This paper, while it reports the results of research undertaken across the year prior to the events of September 11 and their aftermath, presents an analysis that is both timely and relevant given those events. This important paper represents the kind of original thinking that this Institute was designed in the hope of fostering. The two authors—each of whom is individually the winner of a previous INSS outstanding research award—develop and test a systematic, targeted, and useful methodology for examining the non-state political violence and its practitioner that the United States now faces. Their analysis also is grounded in Central Asia, a new but increasingly important region to United States military interest and presence. The paper stands well on either of those legs—a systematic methodology for violent non-state actors or a detailed and security oriented examination of an emerging critical region. Taken together, the two legs mark it as a singularly significant work, one well worthy of serious study.

About the Institute

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JAMES M. SMITH
Director

LORDS OF THE SILK ROUTE: VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS IN CENTRAL ASIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Central Asia, as in much of the developing world, the warlord is returning triumphant while the state withers in its arbitrary, post-colonial borders. Transnational dynamics at the sub-national level are interacting to create regional incubators for violent non-state actors (VNSAs). Some VNSAs already pose a real, direct challenge to state sovereignty and regional security. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, for example, employs terrorist and guerrilla tactics to seek the ouster of Uzbekistan's President, Islam Karimov. As VNSAs gain greater access to resources and transnational networks, they increasingly pose a threat to neighboring states and the security of non-regional powers. The ancient Silk Route, which once brought Chinese treasures to Europe and the Middle East, is thriving again. The caravans of the 21st Century, however, are moving a loathsome cargo at the core of transnational security issues facing the international community.

It is the contention of this paper that the new warlords of the developing world pose a pressing security challenge for which regional governments and western powers, including the United States (US), are not adequately prepared. The post-heroic objectives and asymmetric methods embraced by VNSAs shatter the assumptions of the "Clausewitzian Trinity" on which the modern nation-state roots its conception of conflict. The new VNSAs are already challenging our understanding of how traditional constructs of deterrence, coercion and warfighting apply. Developing viable policies and responses to these threats demands a rigorous examination of the linkages between the spawning of VNSAs and transnational security issues at the sub-national level. We further assert that non-traditional security issues, such as resource scarcity and demographics pressures, are gaining relevance as explanatory factors in the transformation from passive individual deprivation to violent collective action.

Our approach to understanding the new face of violent collective action adds value by deviating from the reliance on the state as the primary unit of analysis. The standard approach, particularly in Central Asia, is to focus on state failure and the important role played by other states in supporting the struggling regime or furthering its decay. While we do not discount the value of state-centered approaches, we are convinced they must be

complemented by an examination of the dynamics working at the sub-national level with the non-state actor as the primary unit of analysis. To this end, our principal objective is to introduce an open systems analytical framework that provides explanatory, and possibly predicative, insight to the system of relationships and the cycle of violence at work in Central Asia. Although this framework is in its initial offering, we contend that its further development will yield benefits for comparative study in other regions of the world. Our second objective is to offer insight to the roots of violence most likely to create the environment in which VNSAs emerge and prosper. We also take on the objective of engendering an appreciation for the range of potential VNSAs organizational types and the forms of collective violence employed to increase their power. Our final objective is to explain the linkages between roots of violence and VNSAs, focusing on reinforcing behaviors as well as failures in state governance and identity mobilization as key transformational engines.

LORDS OF THE SILK ROUTE: VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS IN CENTRAL ASIA

A VIOLENT SYSTEM

Samarkand Dispatch: *The aged helicopter rose unexpectedly from behind a barren, tanned ridge, catching the two French archeologists and their guides off guard. Armed, grizzled men, unadorned by any insignia, emerged from the groaning bird. The Uzbek guides were forced on board to the prodding of AK-47s. Within minutes, the archeologists were left staring in bewilderment as the helicopter flew low to the east over the Fan Mountains, disappearing into the rugged terrain of western Tajikistan. Rumor of the incident and its unconfirmed details spread quickly. Although the Uzbekistan government refused to acknowledge the armed abduction, roads in the east, particularly in and out of the Ferghana Valley, were suddenly closed to overland tourist travel. On the street, the brazen display of military force was seen as evidence of the impending renewal of guerrilla operations by Islamic militants. To the foreign observer, and most certainly to the archeologists, the incident hinted at the growing capacity of violent non-state actors to act with impunity in the hinterlands of a nation-state.**

Objectives

In Central Asia, as in much of the developing world, the warlord is returning triumphant while the state withers in its arbitrary, post-colonial borders. Transnational dynamics at the sub-national level are interacting to create regional incubators for violent non-state actors (VNSAs). Some VNSAs already pose a real, direct challenge to state sovereignty and regional security. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), for example, employs terrorist and guerrilla tactics to seek the ouster of Uzbekistan's

* Editor's note: This and other vignettes in this paper are observations and accounts gathered by the authors from their travel in support of the research for this paper. They are included in this otherwise more traditional scholarly format to underscore points made by the authors.

President, Islam Karimov. As VNSAs gain greater access to resources and transnational networks, they increasingly pose a threat to neighboring states and the security of non-regional powers—they have global reach. The ancient Silk Route, which once brought Chinese treasures to Europe and the Middle East, is thriving again. The caravans of the 21st Century, however, are moving a loathsome cargo at the core of prominent transnational security issues facing the international community.

It is our contention that the new warlords of the developing world pose a pressing security challenge for which regional governments and western powers, including the United States, are not adequately prepared. As a subset of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) growing at a rate of 3-5 percent annually, VNSAs are proliferating and gaining strength while the sovereignty of the nation-state is being transformed by the systemic effects of integration and disintegration.¹ The number of states has increased dramatically since the 1950s, from around 60 to over 190, due in part to deterioration in legitimacy combined with increasing demands for self-determination. We are also witnessing a dramatic increase in brutal civil conflicts and heinous acts of terrorism. Since the end of the Cold War period in 1989, 107 civil wars have erupted, each involving multiple VNSAs, as compared to only seven interstate conflicts.²

The post-heroic objectives and asymmetric methods embraced by VNSAs also shatter the assumptions of the “Clausewitzian Trinity” on which the modern nation-state roots its conception of conflict.³ That is, VNSAs are not states organizing public-supported, mass violence to achieve political ends. The new VNSAs are already challenging our understanding of how

traditional constructs of deterrence, coercion, and warfighting apply. Developing viable policies and responses to these threats demands a rigorous examination of the linkages between the spawning of VNSAs and transnational security issues at the sub-national level. We further assert that non-traditional security issues, such as resource scarcity and demographics pressures, are gaining relevance as explanatory factors in the transformation from passive individual deprivation to violent collective action.

In an effort to understand this contemporary face of violent collective action, we begin by introducing an analytical framework that provides explanatory, and possibly predicative insight to the system of relationships that produce VNSAs. Although this framework is in its initial offering, we contend that its further development will yield benefits for comparative study in other regions of the world. As part of our specific application to Central Asia, we will regularly intertwine descriptive stories based on our three-week journey across the region in an effort blend a sense of place with our analysis. It is our hope that this color commentary will elucidate the narrative we are trying to construct; a story of how a hopeful individual engaged in the routine activities of life can be transformed in to a drug runner and terrorist.

Our second objective is to offer insight to the roots of violence most likely to create the environment in which VNSAs emerge and prosper. We also take on the objective of engendering an appreciation for the range of potential VNSA organizational types and the forms of collective violence employed to increase their power. Our final objective is to explain the linkages between roots of violence and VNSAs, focusing on reinforcing behaviors as well as failures in state governance and identity mobilization as key

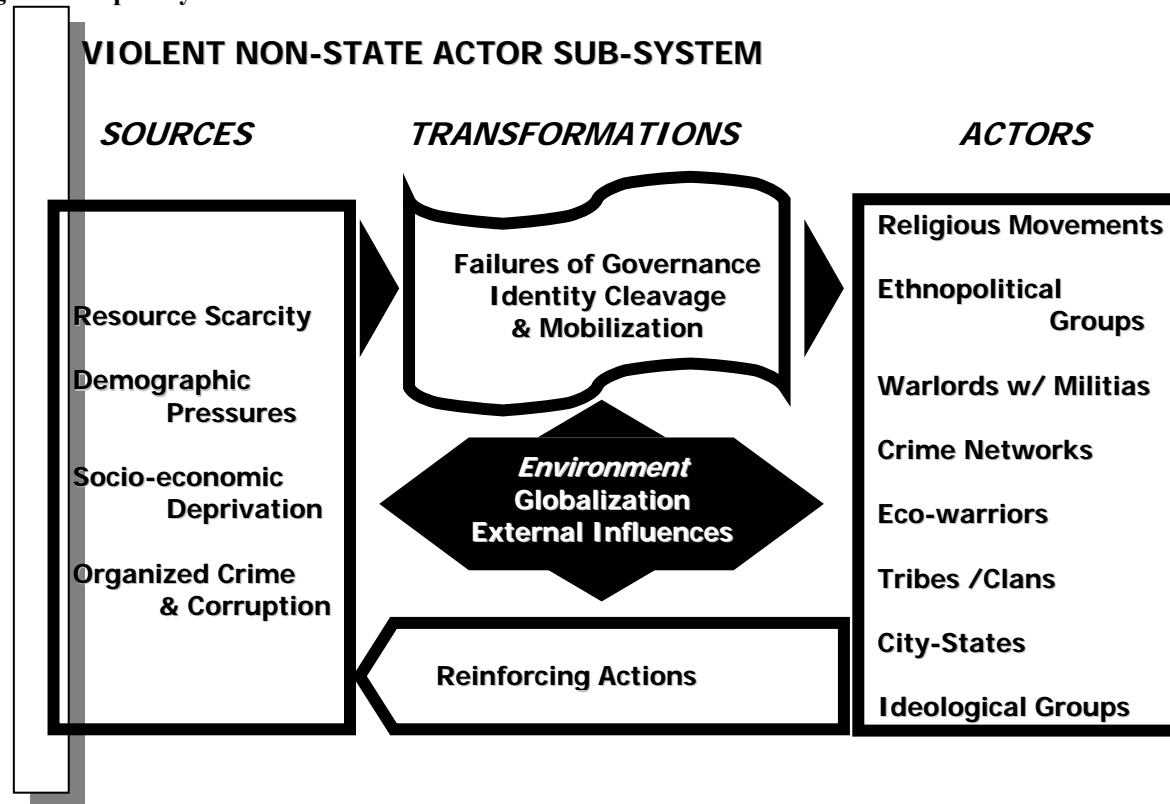
transformational engines. Our approach adds further value by deviating from the reliance on the state as the primary unit of analysis. The standard approach, particularly in Central Asia, is to focus on state failure and the important role played by other states in supporting the struggling regime or furthering its decay. While we do not discount the value of state-centered approaches, we are convinced they must be complemented by an examination of the dynamics working at the sub-national level with the non-state actor as the primary unit of analysis.

System of Violence

Our approach is founded in a systems perspective, which enables an understanding of VNSAs within the context of a structured environment, consisting of multiple sub-systems interacting to make up the whole system. As argued by Kenneth Waltz, some part of our understanding of system outputs and actor behaviors is found within the structure of the system itself.⁴ The structure explains the “arrangement, or the ordering, of the parts of the system.”⁵ As shown in Figure 1, our system’s structure includes roots of violence (inputs), transformations, VNSAs (outputs), and environmental factors. These system elements interact in a highly dynamic, causative manner to spawn the VNSAs of the developing world. This framework effectively captures the disparate factors that are too often examined in isolation, and draws needed attention to the salient relationships that enable the cycle of violent collective action to thrive.

As an open system, our framework allows for environmental factors, which is particularly important given the transnational character of many VNSAs. It allows us to consider the influence of such international dynamics as globalization and the role of external

Figure 1: Open System Model



powers. Globalization can undermine state sovereignty by contributing to the commercialization of VNSA behaviors and objectives. External powers also play an important role as evidenced by the abundant research on Russian and Chinese policy toward Central Asia. These dominant players as well as Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and many western states, including the United States, have a significant impact on the system. Rather than treating environmental factors separately, we weave them into our analysis.

A brief accounting of one particularly infamous warlord serves nicely to set up the following overview of the framework's core elements. Standing among heavily laden fruit trees with the murky waters of the Syr Darya flowing nearby, it was difficult for us to envision the fierce fighting that occurred in November 1998 between Tajik government forces and the private army of a renegade Uzbek warlord. Taking advantage of a puzzle-work of borders that delineate the Ferghana Valley, Colonel Makhmud Khudoiberdiyev led nine hundred armed militia in a raid into Tajikistan from Uzbekistan, seizing security installations in the northern town of Khujand. As many as 200 were killed and 500 injured, including innocent civilians, in the two weeks of fighting.⁶ Colonel Khudoiberdiyev recruited locally from a growing pool of disaffected young men, gained training and weapons from the Taliban in Afghanistan, and took advantage of Dushanbe's inability to secure its northern region.

Roots of Violence. While there are many dynamic forces impacting the system, the roots of violence proffered in the next section have explanatory power regarding the formation of an at-risk population, ripe for mobilization along existing identity

cleavages. They are transnational forces at the sub-national level with a direct impact on the individual. As with the unemployed, dispossessed young men in Colonel Khudoiberdiyev's private army, it is the individual who must be mobilized to become a member of a collectivity and embrace violent action. Roots of violence are highly interrelated and a greater stress in each has a synergistic effect on the whole. In regions where the synergistic effect is most acute, the system is highly likely to undergo a transformation resulting in the rise of VNSAs. Central Asia proves its worth as a case study given the prevalence of the most salient roots of violence. The unemployed youth of Khojand are certainly affected by tensions to include resource scarcity, demographic pressures, crime and corruption and socio-economic deprivation that undermine any embryonic loyalty to their assigned states.

Transformations. A transformation must occur before the Khojand youth become members of a VNSA like Khudoiberdiyev's private army. The relational aspect of our system of violence is tackled in the paper's third section. The conversion from individual passivity to collective activity is difficult to explain and harder to predict. Moreover, current research focuses almost solely on state failure as the primary catalyst. Although we agree that a weakened state is a key intervening variable, we assert that identity mobilization is an equally viable explanatory factor. We also amend the traditional view of state failure in terms of a weakened capacity to include failure due to extreme coercive action. This approach integrates contemporary insights on the state failure with early research on revolutionary and insurgent movements to achieve an understanding of the transformational process. Once Colonel Khudoiberdiyev's private army emerges from the primal soup of a

weak state and identity mobilization, it is likely to engage in reinforcing actions that perpetuate and possibly expand the systemic cycle of violence. Together, a weakened state, identity cleavages and mobilization, and reinforcing actions undermine the prospects for a decline in collective violence and the emergence of a stable, prosperous system.

Violent Non-State Actors. Our inquiry continues in the fourth section with the output of our system—the VNSA. The VNSA is the focus of our analysis principally because it does the shooting, plants the bomb, and conducts the guerilla assault. Even if we are not successful in understanding the sources of tension and transformations leading to its birth, we are obligated by the reality of the threat to appreciate the range of potential non-state actors and the preferred forms of violent action. This analysis is of particular value given the narrow range of non-state actors typically considered.

Central Asia provides fertile soil for investigating the range of potential VNSAs. Our research reveals at least nine primary collectivities, although many variations are certain to exist: militant religious movements, transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), ethno-political groups, private militias, tribes or clans, city-states (regionalism), eco-warriors, and ideological political parties. Future analysts may be wise to consider adding multi-national corporations with robust security forces as potential VNSAs. For example, the security forces at the various Microsoft offices in Costa Rica dwarf that nation's own security forces, and the impressive security presence of the Daewoo industrial site in the Ferghana Valley is significant enough to affect the power calculus in the region. Our list reflects the groups of primary focus in international security

studies and others that have been the subject of neglect. Although all non-state actors are not currently mobilized for organized violence in Central Asia, all exist with at least a latent potential for mobilization.

Silk Route Nexus

Our framework and its application to Central Asia should prove meaningful for a wide variety of stakeholders, ranging from the NGO leader seeking to leverage developmental assistance to the Air Force intelligence officer charged with targeting emerging threats. Moreover, this research should be valuable to those focusing on Central Asia regardless of whether they are involved in furthering diplomatic relationships, planning military operations, or studying the rich array of socio-economic issues confronting the not-so-newly independent states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Indeed, research and regional travel convinced us of Central Asia's value as fertile soil for an examination of VNSAs.

The conventional focus on the state has led to a treatment of the region in a monolithic manner due to the structural legacies of the Soviet era and the persistence of communist bosses in leadership positions. While these similarities and others do exist from one state to the next, Central Asia must also be appreciated for its diversity, particularly in terms of identity cleavages. These cleavages, such as tribal affiliations, undermine state efforts to grow nationalism and serve as schisms that render borders less meaningful. Focusing on Central Asia as a region, or a sub-system within a global system, allows us to investigate actors and issues that transcend the artificial boundaries imposed by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Central Asia also proves its metal for the application

The Caucasus and Central Asia



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of our framework because every core transnational security issue is at play to varying degrees across the region. As our research reveals, the hub of the ancient Silk Route is now the nexus for a potentially volatile cocktail of actors and issues.

ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

Ashgabat Dispatch: *A weary father joins a gathering crowd on the street corner, anticipating the collapse of a run-down apartment block. Anxious neighbors peer from windows as the steel chain cuts down the side of the adjoining building; a drab gray Soviet structure like their own. The father knows his building is next to fall in the remodeling plan for Ashgabat. As the capital of Turkmenistan continues its transition from Soviet outpost to turgid capital, the families of the inner city are being forcibly relocated to a sprawling periphery of equally squalid apartments or to outlying villages. In his new community he can expect acute levels of unemployment and derelict health care. If he can find work at all, maybe loading camels at the Tolkuchka Sunday Bazaar, a portion of his income will undoubtedly be needed to bribe his children's teachers for passing marks. Shortages of bread, which led to armed revolt in recent years, will undoubtedly add to his frustration.*

Deep Roots

A passivity formed by several generations of authoritarian rule is likely to characterize this Turkmen father's response to difficult circumstances. Submission is unlikely, however, to reflect the attitude of all Turkmen, particularly those of a younger generation whose expectations are high for a country that the enigmatic leader of Turkmenistan, Turkmenabashi, hails as the "new Kuwait." For the young Turkmen and their similarly positioned peers along the Silk Route, these frustrations are undermining any embryonic sense of citizenship. Pressures at the sub-national level are creating at-risk populations in which dispossessed individuals are rendered ripe for mobilization into violent identity-based groups. These roots of violence are not unique to Central Asia or the post-Cold War period, nor are they the only sources of conflict in the system. That

said, we assert they are the most likely to create populations at risk to manipulation by the re-emergent ideologies of hate, religion, and greed. The Islamic militants of Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network and the armed men of the Yohmud clan in Turkmenistan represent the new Marxists and Maoists of the early 21st century.

The landscape of contemporary organized violence has as much to do with the "tremendous stresses on human communities" as it does with geographically defined power struggles.⁷ From among the varied sources of human insecurity, our analysis focuses on four specific stresses that we contend are most likely to make individuals susceptible to transformation into a VNSA: resource scarcity, demographic pressures, socio-economic deprivation, and organized crime and corruption. Each underlying dynamic serves to place significant stress on the individual, civil society, and state. Importantly, these roots are unlikely to be sole causal factors in creating an at-risk population. Rather, it is their mutually reinforcing interaction that is key. There is no magic threshold for collective violence; however, severe stresses in any one area may be sufficient to engender a sense of individual hopelessness. Grave stresses across the board are a strong indicator of impending violence by non-state actors. The transformation from despair to anger expressed through collective violence is also a function of state response (coercion or impotence) as well the resources and leadership of the mobilizing VNSA.

The roots of violence are the inputs to our open systems framework. Rather than focusing on these stresses as sources of inter-state conflict or civil war as is in current research, we adapt them to an explanation of identity-based mobilization and ultimately, the warlord's triumph. A more effective response to the

VNSA threat can be crafted only when an understanding of the underlying causes examined here is linked to a study of transformational engines, which is tackled in the next section. Moreover, we zero in on the threats VNSAs pose to external actors such as the US or UN, the authority of state, the security of communities, and the activities of other non-state actors. While many of the VNSAs under our microscope do appear to have a will to power, it is clear many armed non-state groups are focused on protecting turf, controlling networks of illicit trade, or accumulating wealth. For these VNSAs, the overthrow of the state is a secondary or even tertiary objective. Transnational criminal organizations, such as the caviar mafia in the Caspian basin, are quite content to exist beyond the control or even with the acquiescence of the state.

Resource Scarcity

Trying to rinse the salty glaze off our arms and face with what could be best described as brackish water, the specter of the dried Aral Sea was reaching as far west as Bukhara. Having washed down a dinner of *sashlik* (globes of fat thinly marbled with meat, roasted on a metal kabob) with equally salty tea, our own bodies were becoming testaments to the ill effects of low-quality water. Water, the most basic resource needed by all living creatures, is not plentiful in most of Central Asia; clean, potable water is in even shorter supply. A water crisis could create a backdrop that augments VNSA incubation; indeed, resource scarcities in general could weaken the fabric of both state and society, creating conditions more amenable to VNSA development.

The intersection of resource scarcity and the rise of non-state actors is a relatively new line of inquiry. The notion that environmental degradation or resource deprivation could have an

impact on security issues, while having its roots as early as the 1960s, left the fringe of studies in the late 1970s. Lester Brown of the World Watch Institute wrote extensively on an expanding notion of national security to include resource scarcity.⁸ Since then, political scientists, sociologists, environmentalists, and even prominent politicians have reflected their belief that resource scarcity and environmental degradation (which often go hand-in-hand) have a place in security issues.

A significant contributor to this body of literature is Thomas Homer-Dixon. His research suggests a variety of environmental issues, prominently resource scarcity, can impact social order and state stability. Through careful modeling and empirical observation, Homer-Dixon argues that resource scarcity can lead to conflict through three main routes, each with a unique type of conflict: (1) decreasing supplies of physically controllable resources can provoke interstate “simple scarcity” conflicts; (2) large population movements caused by environmental stress can precipitate “group-identity” conflicts, specifically ethnic clashes; and (3) severe environmental scarcity can increase economic deprivation and disrupt key social institutions, precipitating “deprivation” conflicts, such as civil strife and insurgency.⁹ While all are applicable to Central Asia, the last two are the most relevant to our line of inquiry.

It is important to provide a working definition of “resource scarcity.” Drawing again on Homer-Dixon, resource scarcity can come from three different sources: (1) a decline in the quality and/or quantity of renewable or (especially) non-renewable resources, which can provoke resource scarcity conflict between states; (2) population growth, which reduces the per capita availability of

resources; and (3) unequal resource distribution among a given population.¹⁰ As before, Central Asia reflects all three components of resource scarcity, but the last facet of resource scarcity is especially germane to a discussion of Central Asia, as it influences nearly all of the resulting system outputs—VNSAs.

The chain of events from resource scarcity to conflict is fairly clear. Homer-Dixon admits that resource scarcity is certainly not the sole incubator of conflict; we extend this contention to the creation of VNSAs. Empirics indicate, however, that Central Asia's varied and worsening environmental scarcities interact with the structure and operation of the various states in the region to trigger processes that heighten ethnic, communal, and class-based rivalries. This combination of forces encourages resource capture, the marginalization of the poor, rising economic hardship, and a progressive weakening of the state. These processes, in turn, culminate in increased group-identity and deprivation conflicts.

All three dynamics of resource scarcity are at play in Central Asia. The supply of many basic resources (especially water and arable land) have always been historically low; resource scarcity is also affected by demand, as populations are growing rapidly and per capita resource use and wasteful state use is increasing; and structural shortages, where corruption leads to disproportionate resource allocation among elites at the expense of the larger population. An exhaustive treatment of resource scarcity in Central Asia would include much more than water and arable land—the corollary resources (particularly food and forest resources) are in demand as well. However, water and arable land are more than adequate to demonstrate how resource scarcity can contribute to the mobilization of individuals and incubation of VNSAs.

Water Woes. Water is the leading resource issue in Central Asia. In a word, Central Asia faces a crisis in water. The Aral Sea is drying up, and may be gone completely by 2012. Only a third of the Aral's surface area remains.¹¹ The two major rivers feeding the Aral, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, long ago ceased reaching the sea, which is now actually two smaller "lakes." The drying of the Aral Sea has increased the salinity of water in all of western Central Asia, and the extensive residual salt is often whipped by the winds, coating everything in its path. A severe drought, which some meteorologists contend will be a permanent feature due to loss of the Aral, has gripped the region for a second year. Further, exceptionally poor water infrastructures lose at least as much water as is transported—evidenced by the hundreds of miles of lush weeds that grow along all major canals and irrigation systems. Other water aggravations include lavish, yet wasteful uses of water for politically pretentious purposes. For example, Ashgabat boasts both the largest water fountain in the world and has incredible displays of various "water architectures" throughout the city. President Saparmurat Niyazov also declared his intention to create the "Turkmenbashi Sea" just north of Ashgabat—in the middle of the vast Kizilkum Desert—by diverting more water from the already hyper-exploited Amu Darya, via the Karakum Canal.

Historically, as with so many resources during Soviet times, water was commonly controlled by the state. As exclusive state property, it was also a free good.¹² Water use and allocation were based on the "Fundamentals of Water Legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics" of 1970. This central, nation-wide guidance also crafted the water codes for the individual Soviet Republics.¹³ This background is important in two distinct ways. First, as all

water utilization and allocation was decided by Moscow, there is no tradition at all in Central Asia for regional water-sharing agreements between the five governments. Second, as with any free resource, water was wasted. In the early days of the Soviet Union, with a low industrial rate and a small population, water utilization could be less than optimal with minimal impact. With populations that are at least doubled since the 1960s and water resources becoming increasingly scarce in much of Central Asia, squandering is no longer a viable option. This well-documented sub-regional scarcity, so thoroughly studied in academia, is juxtaposed by the nearly universal Central Asian practice of slinging bowls of water on one's driveway or sidewalk in the morning and in the evening, the many ostentatious fountains in major cities, and the hundreds of miles of leaky, weed-infested canals bringing water to the desert.

Another important factor when discussing water resource scarcity in Central Asia is the vast water disparities in the region. While Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are largely steppe or desert, mountainous Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have ample water supply. Indeed, the headwaters of the two most important water sources in the region, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, originate in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan respectively. The Amu Darya then flows through Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan where it simply dries up before reaching the Aral Sea. The Syr Darya, on the other hand, flows through all the Central Asia Republics except Tajikistan, crossing political borders several times, and at least in the case of Uzbekistan, enters, leaves, and re-enters further to the west.

Two things are important regarding this complex hydro-geography. First, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan control the headwaters of these rivers, and therefore technically, control the flow of the

waters. Thus, either country is at least theoretically capable of building enough dams or reservoirs to significantly reduce (or for short periods of time, actually stop) the flow of the rivers to the downstream riparians. These downstream riparians are militarily and economically (with the possible exception of Turkmenistan) more powerful than the upstream riparians. Most analysts who study international river basins agree with this arrangement—a stronger downstream riparian dependent on water from a weaker upstream riparian is the most unstable and conflict-prone type of basin.

Second, multiple border crossings by both these rivers complicate regional water sharing agreements. In issues of both quantity of water taken and quality of water leaving the country, each country always demands more and higher quality water from its upstream neighbor. Another very significant issue is water utilization. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan typically use their water for hydroelectric power production. Thus, they tend to fill their reservoirs during the summer and release water during the winter when more power is needed. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, on the other hand, need that water released during the summer for irrigation purposes. Thus, the timing of water release from the upstream riparians creates a considerable amount of tension as well.

The potential for this to create an interstate resource scarcity conflict is substantial. Tension between states regarding water is already palpable. This became obvious when the owner of the flat we rented in Ferghana explained why the bathtub was full of water (for emergencies after 7:00 pm, when the water was cut off) and instructed us to try to avoid using the facilities during the night.

Kyrgyzstan had cut the water flow of the Syr Darya to eastern Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government, in response, stopped electricity flows from power plants in the Ferghana Valley.¹⁴ Additionally, Kyrgyzstan filled the Toktogul Reservoir with waters from the Naryn River, which is fed from snowmelt in the far-off Central Tian Shan Range. This reservoir, lying in the western-most quarter of Kyrgyzstan, is very vulnerable to either an Uzbek or Kazakh military intrusion; several guides, officials, and individuals expressed fear that if the water situation got worse, Uzbekistan could be the most likely next owner of Toktogul. Several other scenarios exist; for example, the depletion of Lake Balkash waters in Kazakhstan will be accelerated by China's recent decision to divert two rivers that feed into the lake in order to expand irrigation in the Xinjiang province.¹⁵ Certainly this decision will complicate Kazakh-Sino relations in the future.

Research regarding non-state conflict over water is far less substantial, but this too is an area where conflict can occur. As Stefan Klotzki stated in 1994, "Ethnic minorities could use ecological problems as a vehicle for imposing their interests against the titular nation, as has happened in the disintegration of the Soviet Union in many different regions."¹⁶ Based on persistent resource scarcities, the most likely form of non-state conflict in the near term is "deprivation conflict," where substate actors will fight one another for water due to low supply and/or unequal or unfair distribution of water. As one possible case, a survey of the entire Aral Sea basin in 1994 identified a total of 32 major irrigation systems—23 on the Amu Darya and nine on the Syr Darya. The most ethnically contentious irrigation systems were found in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.¹⁷ Some of these irrigation

systems lie in ethnically diverse (and torn) areas such as the irrigation systems in the Ferghana valley. Other irrigation systems straddle political borders—like the system used by the Uzbek minority in Dashoguz, Turkmenistan and the semi-autonomous Karakalpaks in western Uzbekistan. Others go through areas previously torn by civil strife; the Vakhsh/Pyandsh system is split between Gorno-Badakhshan and Kurgan Tyube, two bitter regional rivals in Tajikistan's civil war.

It is also important to understand water (and to a lesser extent land) is already established as a flashpoint. For example, the UN reported that in 1989, tensions over access to water resulted in a violent conflict where several people were killed and injured in the village of Samarkandik, a Tajik enclave within western Kyrgyzstan. The following year, the Ferghana Valley city of Osh, Kyrgyzstan, witnessed a much larger conflict over allocation of scarce land resources. The warring parties fell along ethnic lines—Uzbeks fighting Kyrgyz, where at least 300 people (possibly up to 1,000) were killed, and well over 1,000 wounded. Additionally, more than 5,000 crimes were reported, including the destruction of homes, robbery and rapes. A potential water conflict simmering on the horizon may spring from decisions to drastically cut water flow to the downstream riparians in July, 2000. This caused Kazakhstan to lose possibly up to twenty percent of its cotton crop last year.¹⁸

Three different catalysts could cause water shortages to further mobilize various groups to turn violent to advance their goals. First is a continued supply crunch. Central Asia is already consuming far more water than is being naturally replenished. As Peter Gleick calculated, per capita water availability in 2000 is estimated at 700 m³, significantly down from the estimated 7500 m³ in 1950 and the

2000 m³ in 1980.¹⁹ By comparison, US citizens enjoy approximately 4000 m³ of available water per capita; 1000 m³ of water per capita is considered necessary to maintain an adequate standard of living in a moderately developed country. As the per capita water availability continues to shrink (data is not available for 2001, but will surely be less than 700 m³ due to the severe drought in the region), localities will be the first to resort to violence for two reasons. First, certain localities are already in critical water shortages, and any further reduction in water supply may push such localities over the edge. One such region is Karakalpakstan, which is located in western Uzbekistan near the Aral Sea. Second, while states may negotiate prior to resorting to force to secure adequate water for their populations, individuals and small groups will mobilize and resort to violence much sooner. Groups that are already formed along some other identity cleavage will be especially prone to violence.

A second possible catalyst for environmental conflict is the further erosion, or possible collapse, of the agricultural sector, especially in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. With yields already 30% below peak production during the Soviet days (largely due to drought and a precipitous drop in water and soil quality), resulting in increasingly fewer rural jobs, the monoculture of cotton consumes an enormous amount of the scarce water resources throughout the region. Driving throughout Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the authors saw thousands of acres of salt-encrusted earth where cotton fields used to be. The farmers of the region have had to resort to “washing” their fields prior to planting cotton—actually flooding the fields, then bringing huge vacuums to suck away the then salty water—in order to make the soil marginally

useful. Should this already teetering sector of the economy cease delivering what economic security it now provides, rural farmers (which have already demonstrated a penchant for violence while in duress) could choose conflict to express their frustrations.

Figure 2: Central Asian Ecological Migrants (Since 1988)

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|
| Aral Sea to Kazakhstan | 30,000 |
| Aral Sea to CIS at large | 13,000 |
| Aral Sea to Uzbekistan | 50,000+ |
| Semipalatinsk w/in Kazakhstan | 45,000 |
| Semipalatinsk to CIS at large | 116,000 |
| Kyrgyzstan w/in Kyrgyzstan | 17,000 |

A third environmental catalyst that could lead to conflict is a massive flight from rural to urban areas due to continued drought, which we explore further under demographic pressures. Already, access to the capital cities in all Central Asia republics is tightly controlled, and the ruling elite would no doubt unfavorably view any massive refugee movement to urban areas. Indeed, many young unemployed people moving to urban areas report having to pay police in order to simply *be* in the cities—let alone the bribes which would be necessary in order to find employment.²⁰ Some level of ecologically-induced population movement is already evident. As shown in Figure 2, some reports suggest that as many of 270,000 migrants resulted from ecological disaster.²¹

Demographic Pressures

The forced displacement of central Ashgabat residents in our opening example is one instance among many in Central Asia of how demographic pressure can be a root of violence. Although there is little evidence to support demographic pressures as a singular cause of armed conflict, there is a growing appreciation for its contributory role. Demographic stresses can accentuate

underdevelopment, crime, and resource scarcity. An understanding of demographic pressures provides insight to the future of urban violence, the power play of dispossessed youth and the weakening of the state.

Population Ambush. Our analysis considers population as more than a static measure of national power.²² Rather, demographic pressures are a function of both composition and dynamics.²³ Composition refers to the characteristics of a given population, including size, age distribution, and religious/ethnic-makeup. Population dynamics entail changes in population composition over time. Moreover, demographic pressures are most often assessed as a source of conflict between states. For our analysis, composition and changes in populations that brew non-state violence are more important. In this context, the two most salient dynamics are fertility and migration patterns. The compositional factors associated with negative demographic pressures are “youth bulges” and urban density. It is the reinforcing relationships between dynamics and composition that create the conditions for individual deprivation and eventual mobilization into identity-based groups.

Figure 3: Central Asian Demographics

| Figure 3 | Population | Popu- ation Growth per | Fertility (births per woman) | Infant Mortality (per 1000) | Net Migration (per 1000) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Uzbekistan | 25,155,064 | 1.60% | 3.06 | 71.92 | -2.06 |
| Turkmenistan | 4,603,244 | 1.85% | 3.58 | 73.25 | -1.04 |
| Tajikistan | 6,518,681 | 2.12% | 4.29 | 116.09 | -3.49 |
| Kazakhstan | 16,731,303 | 0.03% | 2.07 | 59.17 | -6.43 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 4,753,003 | 1.44% | 3.19 | 76.5 | -2.66 |
| CIA World Factbook 2001 | | | | | |

Persistent fertility rates above the replacement value of children per family can expand the population beyond the capacity of governance. When high fertility rates are combined with declining death rates, the result is a population explosion that will persist until the demographic transition is completed by a corresponding decline in fertility. This population explosion has been forestalled in Central Asia due primarily to acute underdevelopment and migration. As the data in Figure 3 make clear, infant mortality rates are high by western standards (6.76 in US) and net migration values are negative.

Despite these negative trends, the high fertility rates throughout the region and strong growth rates are creating destabilizing demographic pressures. In particular, a rapidly increasing youthful population is demanding the education, employment, and health care promised at independence. According to 2000 data collected by the US Census Bureau, a substantial percentage of each country's population is below the age of 30: Uzbekistan-65.3%, Turkmenistan-66%, Tajikistan-69.4%, Kazakhstan-51.4%, and Kyrgyzstan-63%.²⁴ Leaders in Dushanbe, Tashkent, Bishkek, Ashgabat, and Astana have proven incapable of satisfying expectations they initially raised. Along the so-called "Broadway" of Tashkent, young men in their late teens and twenties gather in pool halls and on street-corners. They market in cigarettes, cheap wine, and prostitution. To the careful observer, evidence of drug and alcohol addiction marks their faces and arms. Thousands of similar broken young men litter the streets of Central Asia, each a candidate for mobilization into a criminal gang or militant religious movement.

The population growth trends in Central Asia are also certain to reduce the per capita availability of resources, exacerbating water and land depletion.²⁵ As argued in our analysis of resource scarcity, dramatic demographic shifts are resulting from ecological decay. According to conservative estimates, over 250,000 people had already moved out of ecological disaster areas within five years of independence.²⁶ These shifts not only transfer stresses from rural to urban areas, but also serve as catalysts for group-identity conflicts.²⁷ Drought in eastern Uzbekistan stemming from the depletion of water has already driven thousands to urban centers, particularly Tashkent, adding to a significant pool of unemployed youth.

Migration Strains. In addition to ecological decay, substantial demographic shifts can also result from acute underdevelopment, political change, and conflict. Migratory pressures include refugees and migrants. Refugees tend to move because they are pushed out, often as a function of government policy or the effects of war.²⁸ Migrants tend to move as a result of both push and pull factors. In Central Asia, the push of resource scarcity in one region is often accompanied by the false hope for economic opportunity in another. Whether being pushed or pulled, the numbers for Central Asia are staggering. Over 4.2 million people have moved within, from, or to the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union.²⁹

The remarkable negative migration rates for each country reflect the out-migration of Russians, Germans, and others that are suffering from the collapse of the Soviet system. In Kyrgyzstan alone, over 450,000 people left the country between 1990 and 2001, including 62% of all Russians.³⁰ Over 560,000 Germans, out of 1.1 million, have left the region for Germany since 1992, which represents a significant loss in professional talent.³¹ For the

thousands of doctors, teachers, and engineers who have not been able to emigrate, life in the newly independent states is a struggle to learn new skills as drivers and janitors. The Russians in particular are new to the minority role, and their dissatisfaction with the new system of preferences and patronages is palatable.

Migration result from and contributes to conflict. Fighting in the Ferghana Valley between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks (Turkish minority group) during 1989 left 100 dead and forced the Soviet army to evacuate nearly 74,000 Meskhetians. Two to five hundred people died just a year later as a result of inter-ethnic fighting between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh and nearby Uzgen. The numbers displaced are not known; however, persistent violence in the Ferghana Valley continues to push individuals out and to the capital cities. In 1994 alone, over 116,000 Kyrgyz moved from the southern rural areas around Osh to the more industrialized north, especially Bishkek.³² Further north, Kazakhstan hosts an estimated 10,000 Chechen refugees from the war in Chechnya. The most dramatic migratory shifts resulted from the devastating civil war in Tajikistan, which witnessed the displacement of over 700,000 people, including 60,000 who fled to the war-torn Afghanistan.³³ While many returned home by the mid-1990s, thousands still remain in surrounding countries. According to the UNHCR's Mid-Year Report 2000, approximately 10,500 remain in Kyrgyzstan, 14,000 Tajik refugees of Turkmen ethnic origin remain in Turkmenistan, 6,000 are in Kazakhstan, and as many as 30,000 may be in Uzbekistan.³⁴

The migratory pressures outlined here pose four broad security threats: 1) opposition to the home regime; 2) political risk to the host country; 3) perceived threat to cultural identity; and 4) social or

economic burden.³⁵ Each of these is at play in Central Asia to varying degrees. For example, Afghan refugees are sources of external support for the Northern Alliance. Russians are now perceived as threats to cultural identity, particularly in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Tajiks refugees add to the already Tajik character of Samarkand and Bukhara, undermining government efforts to establish these ancient Silk Route cities as loci for Uzbek nationalism. Most importantly, all migrants and refugees are posing very real social and economic burdens. Although the hard data is not available, there are anecdotal reports suggesting the need for further inquiry into the contribution of migrants and refugees to criminality, dependency, and delinquency.³⁶ The economic burden is more direct. Migrants and refugees compete for scarce jobs, inadequate health care, and insufficient housing.

Compelling Demographics. The demographic pressures in Central Asia are gaining momentum. The out-migration of the 1990s that kept a lid on rapid population growth has nearly stopped. The impact of high fertility rates is just being realized as an expanding “youth bulge” seeks jobs and services that are actually declining. The stresses of population growth are compounded by the perceived and real threats from migrants and refugees. Even if many refugees can be returned to their home countries, they are likely to be greeted by equally distressing socio-economic deprivation. As weakened regimes thrash about to provide basic services, more and more young men and women are looking to non-state groups to provide access to food and housing. To the teenager of Ashgabat’s peripheral slums and the 28-year-old man loitering in

a Tashkent pool hall, the consistent monthly salary of a criminal network is increasingly appealing.

Organized Crime and Corruption

A train of donkeys loaded with heroin is intercepted along the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan border. A struggling schoolteacher in Karakol, Kyrgyzstan accepts a bribe from impoverished parents for a passing grade. Several hundred automatic rifles are smuggled by Uighar separatists across the border from Kazakhstan to Xinjiang province, China. Traditionally considered a domestic rule of law problem, endemic organized crime and corruption have emerged as transnational roots of violence in the developing world. According to Former Director of Central Intelligence, James R. Woolsey,

Drug trafficking, links between drug traffickers and terrorists, smuggling of illegal aliens, massive financial and bank fraud, arms smuggling, potential involvement in the theft and sale of nuclear material, political intimidation, and corruption all constitute a poisonous brew—a mixture potentially as deadly as what we faced during the cold war.³⁷

The problem is endemic in Central Asia, permeating from the governmental elite to the rural peasant. The roots are fed by the rapid expansion of illicit transnational economic activity, particularly in the global commodities of drugs, small arms, and persons. Underdevelopment, demographic pressures, and resource scarcity foster and result from this destructive duo. Although distinct concepts, the interaction of crime and corruption is a harbinger of a decline in regime legitimacy and the rise of collective violence.

Organized Crime. Crime shifts from a domestic law-and-order problem to legitimate security threat when it becomes organized and

transnational. As defined by Interpol, organized crime involves “any group having a corporate structure whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities, often surviving on fear and corruption.”³⁸ This definition rightfully embraces the core profit motive, the role of violence and the key link to corruption. Along the Silk Route, organized crime prospers both outside state authority and in cooperation with it.

In addition to the massive drug trade discussed below, Central Asia experiences robust transnational crime in oil, caviar, metals, humans, and weapons.³⁹ The most naked form of crime is the black market in oil. Illegal vendors ply their trade along the roadsides of the now paved Silk Routes, offering used plastic water bottles full of dusty petrol. According to Kyrgyzstan’s Interior Ministry, over 155 tons of oil products were smuggled into the country during 1997 and 1998 alone.⁴⁰ Possibly the most insidious organized criminal activity is the vigorous sex trade.⁴¹ Essentially a form of modern slavery, human trafficking trends indicate at least 700,000 and possibly 2 million women and children are illegally smuggled across international borders every year.⁴² Figures for Central Asia are shaky; however, the International Organization for Migration in collaboration with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) report more than 4,000 Kyrgyz women and children were involved in the sex trade during 1999. Other estimates suggest as many as 50,000 to 70,000 in the last few years alone.⁴³

Central Asia is also home to a robust illegal arms trade. According to Jane’s Intelligence Group, an estimated 30 million firearms are circulating throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States.⁴⁴ In 1998, an Iranian “humanitarian” aid train

bound for the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan was intercepted in Osh. Its seventeen cars held 700 tons of weapons, including anti-tank mines, grenades, machine gun ammunition, 122mm artillery shells, and rocket launchers.⁴⁵ In 1999, forty MiG fighter aircraft were “illegally” smuggled from Kazakhstan through the Czech Republic to North Korea. Officially unresolved, it is quite likely well-placed officials were instrumental to the sale, particularly given the mysterious murder of the head of state arms exports shortly thereafter. Non-proliferation efforts are high on the agendas of the US State Department, the OSCE, and other intergovernmental organizations. Russian troops of the 201st Motorized Infantry Division patrol the Tajik-Afghan border in a vain effort to stem the flow between the two weapons-saturated countries.

The transfer of conventional arms is destabilizing enough; however, we are eminently concerned about the potential for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). As the threat of nuclear proliferation from the Semey (Semipalatinsk), Kazakhstan, test site recedes, the threat of biological proliferation is advancing. Once a remote island in the center of the Aral Sea, Ostrov Vozrozhdeniya is increasingly accessible by land as the Aral Sea shrinks. This modest island shared by Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan was home to a sophisticated Soviet biological weapons program until 1992 with laboratories for creating persistent, weaponized variants of anthrax, plague, Q-fever, and other deadly toxins. Giant steel canisters of anthrax spores and other unknown agents were placed underground during the Cold War, but their status—both in regards to safety and security—is unclear. The Russians are not forthcoming, but according to experts at the Monterrey Institute for International Studies, the US sampled viable

spores in recent years.⁴⁶ Absent the introduction of security controls, it is increasingly probable these forgotten toxins will draw the attention of regional VNSAs like the IMU, possibly in collusion with the remnants of Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network.

Corruption Corrupts. Corruption shares the profit motive with crime, but is more narrowly focused on abuse of entrusted power for private gain.⁴⁷ Corruption is not limited to public offices, but includes abuse in the private sector. Bribery serves as the main tool; however, corruption also entails theft, fraud, embezzlement, patronage, and nepotism.⁴⁸ In traditional state-level analysis, focus is on political corruption, such as election manipulation and the effects on regime legitimacy. Equally important is administrative corruption, which has both an individual and systemic impact. Administrative corruption involves illegal private gain for doing what is "ordinarily required by law" (according-to-rule) or what is prohibited by law (against-the-rule).⁴⁹

Political and administrative corruption is ubiquitous in Central Asia. Extensive anti-corruption laws and strong official rhetoric are at odds with the realities of daily life. The Transparency International 2001 Corruption Perceptions Index, for example, assesses "the degree of corruption as seen by business people, academics and risk analysts, and ranges between 10 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt)."⁵⁰ Of 91 countries surveyed, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan tie at 71st with a rating of 2.7.⁵¹ The World Bank estimates one-third of small business annual profits in Uzbekistan go to protection money and bribes.⁵² Turkmenistan would likely bottom out with a score of 0 if polling were allowed. Anecdotal evidence of embezzlement is pervasive, and graft is an aspect of customary transactions—even prisoners must pay bribes to receive

basic necessities.⁵³ Kyrgyzstan is reflective of the region in that meager earnings—civil servants earn approximately \$10-40 per month—encourage supplementing one's income through bribes. On our first day in Bishkek, we experienced a typical shakedown by plain-clothed men posing as police officers. As reported to us by numerous Peace Corps volunteers, the educational system is being subverted through routine bribery of teachers.⁵⁴ The examples are bountiful.

Dark Dynamics. In addition to the synergistic effect of the other roots of violence, there are several key environmental factors at work. Organized crime and the associated corruption represent the dark dynamic of globalization. According to prominent scholar Phil Williams, increased economic interdependence of nation-states, “permeability of national boundaries, and the globalization of international financial networks have facilitated the emergence of what is, in effect, a single global market for both licit and illicit commodities.”⁵⁵

Central Asian borders are notoriously porous. The popularity of the so-called “Northern Route” from the poppy fields of Afghanistan is the direct result of Soviet disintegration and the closing of the Iranian border. Rugged terrain, insufficient border guards and official corruption contribute to the region's newly acquired reputation as the primary route for caravans of drugs, guns, and girls to China, Russia, and on to Europe. The growth of global financial networks has made it increasingly easy to launder money. A globalized informal economy has emerged beyond the control of the state. On the streets of Urgench in western Uzbekistan and Ashgabat, the wide divergence in official and black-market exchange rates for dollars provides direct insight to the advantages

for crime and corruption of commercial liberalization. The problem is compounded in Central Asia where weak state institutions and an underdeveloped civil society persists.⁵⁶

Poppy Problems. The interplay between crime and corruption and the importance of environmental factors is most evident in the burgeoning Central Asian drug trade. Narcotics are quite likely the only true global commodities, generating an estimated \$500 billion a year in revenues for criminal sponsors.⁵⁷ Rarely are these funds used for new libraries. Rather, they make possible the proliferation of weapons used by VNSAs. Silk Route opium, heroin, and cannabis trafficking are at the center of a global drug addiction.

Figure 4: Drug Seizures

| Drug Seizures (all drugs in kg) | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 (9 mo.) |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Kazakhstan | 10,400 | 12,975 | 31,521 | 13,368 | 23,000 | 20,062 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 1,255 | 2,118 | 2,428 | 1,774 | 3,555 | 5,370 |
| Tajikistan | 1,750 | 3,565 | 4,533 | 2,951 | 2,000 | 7,128 |
| Turkmenistan | n/a | 14,109 | 41,216 | 24,157 | 39,555 | 2,200 |
| Uzbekistan | 3,017 | 7,822 | 3,308 | 3,206 | 2,500 | n/a |
| Combined data from UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention | | | | | | |

According to the United Nations, 80% of all heroin consumed in Western Europe originates in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and 50% of these drugs (120 tons of heroin per year) arrive via Central Asia.⁵⁸ These estimates are supported by the most recent data on drug seizures as shown in Figure 4, which probably represent only a small percentage of total flow through. Afghan and Tajik dealers move narcotics through Dushanbe and northward through the increasingly popular Batken route across the mountains between the Batken oblast of Tajikistan and the Osh oblast of Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁹ Although Osh has developed a reputation as the Bogotá of Asia,

new routes are opening, including seven known routes from Tajikistan into Uzbekistan and at least two more from Turkmenistan.⁶⁰

South Asia production is supplemented by rapidly expanding cultivation in Central Asia. The official cultivation of opium on the high slopes around Lake Issy-Kul in Kyrgyzstan ended in 1974; however, drug production continues with the addition of cannabis. Kyrgyz officials indicate one-third of the population is in the business.⁶¹ Fifty grams of marijuana can be bought in any lakeside village for a mere \$3-4. Poppy cultivation also occurs near Samarkand and Surkhandaria in Uzbekistan, in the Penjikent Valley of Tajikistan and the Mary and Lebap regions of Turkmenistan. Kazakh officials estimate that over 15,000 acres of land are covered by wildly growing poppy, cannabis, and ephedra.⁶² State authorities are aggressive in their interdiction and eradication efforts in large part due to the connection between drug trafficking, organized crime, and militant religious movements.

Taking a Toll. Organized Crime and corruption take a toll. Drug addiction alone erodes the social fabric, contributing to increases in crime, the spread of disease, especially HIV/AIDs and lost productivity. The World Bank points to losses in government revenue, reductions in foreign direct investment, barriers to small entrepreneurs, and environmental degradation.⁶³ Moreover, the cancer spreads throughout government, undermining public trust. Systemic crime and corruption can lead common citizens to cynically conclude that it is futile to work through official channels. When ordinary citizens turn to illegal activity for basic needs, or even survival, they quickly become easy recruits for predatory gangs offering a return on illicit activities that dwarfs the average

regional salary of \$10-15 a month. Invariably, the emerging transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) rival the state's power, contributing to its weakness and failing legitimacy.

Socio-economic Deprivation

A young girl, maybe eight or nine, in a tattered yellow dress pushes single cigarettes by briskly circling the plastic tables of an outdoor café in Almaty. An elderly man in the traditional black and white Uzbek skull cap offers a gaze at the moon through his antiquated telescope for a mere five cents. A mother worn beyond her years squats behind a cardboard box table, waiting with a seasoned patience for an equally destitute resident of Turkmenabat to buy a handful of sunflower seeds. Standards of living vary across Central Asia, from rural to urban and from one state to another; however, a common thread of daily struggle exists for all but the small percentage of government and criminal elite. The disparity between Kyrgyz families living in yurts, or huts, in high Tian Shan alpine valleys and Kazakh officials residing in the thick woods above Almaty is striking. The widening gap between rich and poor draws our attention to the socio-economic roots of violence. Building on the intellectual tradition of economic sources for internal rebellion, our analysis incorporates a broader understanding of degenerative human development as a contributor to the emergence of VNSAs.

Rethinking Developmental Conflict. This current wave of internal violence bears similarity to the spate of civil conflict in the Third World during the period of decolonization. During the Cold War, our understanding of this trend was rooted in the development process itself. Essentially, the shedding of the colonial yoke leads to rising expectations that ill-equipped governments are not able to

satisfy. In his seminal work *Why Men Rebel*, Ted Gurr refers to this as relative deprivation; “the perceived discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities.”⁶⁴ The resulting frustration turns to aggression as individuals realize they are being denied the basic necessities they deserve. The evidence of the period also seemed to suggest that instability is most likely during periods of rapid development.⁶⁵

This Cold War thinking warrants reconsideration since many contemporary conflicts are occurring where the developmental process is stagnating, or even deteriorating. Individuals are aware of their deprivation and turning to collective violence earlier. Donald Snow suggests two contributory factors that are consistent with our assertions regarding the impact of globalization and the rise of post-heroic motivations. First, developmental activity in which resources are unfairly allocated is no longer a necessary trigger for rebellion.⁶⁶ Essentially, the global media has brought disparity to the doorstep of even the most rural of peasants. Second, the ideological justification for traditional insurgencies waned.⁶⁷ Very few Marxist and Maoist VNSAs exist, and those that do, such as the Khmer Rouge, are not on the ascendancy. Criminal intent, ethnic hatred, and religious fervor have replaced traditional ideology. These motivations are not always focused on shaping or controlling the developmental process and, therefore, can emerge in societies that are moribund or degenerating.

The concept of development has also transformed beyond a strict consideration of hard economic indicators. Perceived relative deprivation is not just a function of gross national product, but of a broader range of individual values to include expectations for education, health care, sanitation, food, shelter, and even dignity. In

order to measure a state's ability to provide these basic human needs, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) established the Human Development Index (HDI).⁶⁸ The HDI seeks to capture as many aspects of human development as possible in one index. HDI scores on a 0 to 1 scale (.5 is low development) and rankings against 157 other countries (data is not available for 29) place the Central Asian states in the medium development range: Kazakhstan .742 / 75, Kyrgyzstan .707 / 92, Tajikistan .660 / 103, Turkmenistan .730 / 83, and Uzbekistan .698 / 99.⁶⁹ Given the absence of previous HDI scores on all but Uzbekistan, it is difficult to determine whether the situation is improving or deteriorating. For this, we must go behind the aggregate numbers.

Derelict Development. Central Asia is experiencing postponed decolonization. Independence in 1991 was supposed to bring freedom and prosperity. Although holdover communist bosses knew the loss of Soviet funding would be devastating, they nonetheless generated high expectations in an effort to remain in power. They are failing. Across the region, the general population is experiencing persistent socio-economic deprivation. A wide range of indicators is commonly available to get a sense of the situation. These measures of human well-being tend to focus in three broad areas: poverty, education, and health. Central Asia is problematic due to the distinct absence of key indicators as revealed by a survey of statistical resources, including the UNDP, World Bank, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Figure 5 captures relevant and available indicators as a first step toward understanding the situation. Perspective is provided by comparison with US indicators. Combining this limited data set with expert observations

Figure 5: Poverty, Education, and Health Data

| Sources: CIA, World Bank, UNDP | <i>POVERTY</i> | | | <i>EDUCATION</i> | | <i>HEALTH</i> | |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|---|
| | % Below Poverty Line (2001, CIA) | % Unemploy- ment (2001, CIA) | GDP Per Capita- PPP US\$ (2001, CIA) | Gross Enrollment (1999, UNDP)⁷⁰ | Adult Literacy (1999, UNDP) | Physicians per 1,000 (1999, World Bank) | Infant Mortality per 1,000 (2001, CIA) |
| Uzbekistan | NA | 10.00% | \$2,400 | 76.00% | 88.50% | 2.8 | 71.92 |
| Turkmenistan | 58.00% | NA | \$4,300 | 81.00% | 98.00% | 3.6 (1990) | 73.25 |
| Tajikistan | 80.00% | 5.70% | \$1,140 | 67% | 99.10% | 2 | 116.09 |
| Kazakhstan | 35.00% | 13.70% | \$5,000 | 77.00% | 99.00% | 4.3 | 59.17 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 51.00% | 6.00% | \$2,700 | 68.00% | 97.00% | 3 | 76.5 |
| United States | 12.70% | 4.00% | \$36,200 | 95.00% | 100.00% | 2.7 | 6.76 |

strengthens our contention that the governments of Central Asia are failing to adequately meet the basic needs of citizens.

As articulated by the World Bank Group, poverty is hunger, homelessness, sickness, illiteracy, and powerlessness; it is living day to day with no hope for the future.⁷¹ A person is considered poor if their consumption or income level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. This minimum level, known as the “poverty line,” varies—each country uses values appropriate to its level of development and social norms.⁷² To gain a sense of poverty on a global scale, Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is used to account for the relative purchasing power of currencies across countries. Applying this understanding to Central Asia, we note the high percentage living below poverty lines that are artificially high to begin with. Although Uzbekistan is not available, unemployment and PPP indicators suggest a value around 50%. PPP values indicate average citizens survive on \$3.20 a day in Tajikistan to \$13.70 a day in Kazakhstan. Given that most professionals earn less than \$50 a month, we contend that these PPP values are inflated, most likely due to the super-sized incomes of high-level governmental and business elites. In the Uzbek Ferghana Valley, for example, monthly incomes average \$10 as compared to \$15 in the rest of the country.⁷³ On the Tajik side of the border, incomes average under \$8 per month.

Just as PPP values are brought in to question by street-level inquiry, so too are unemployment rates. Official employment rates in the region do not reflect under-employment, which probably exceeds 40% across the region. The grandmother selling sunflower seeds for two cents a cup on the streets of Khiva is technically employed even though she may make a \$1 in a week if lucky.

Unemployment rates are also considerably higher in rural areas. According to Dr. Fiona Hill of the Brookings Institute, as many as 95% of male high school graduates are unable to find jobs.⁷⁴ The potential for unemployment to contribute to social tension is compounded by disproportionately high rates for those under thirty, the failure of the state to provide promised unemployment payments, and uneven distribution of jobs across ethnic groups.⁷⁵

Poverty is difficult to overcome when the education system is also impoverished. Gross enrollment and literacy indicators do not do justice to the deficiencies in regional educational systems. State funding has been on a precipitous decline since the early 1980s. As one example, the Ferghana Valley Working Group, a scholarly investigative team sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, reports that the non-wage element of the education budget has fallen by an estimated 70% in real terms, “resulting in shortages of textbooks and teaching materials and inadequate maintenance of school buildings.”⁷⁶ Our own discussions with students and Peace Corps teachers confirm this grim analysis. Teachers are forced to take bribes to supplement meager earnings, which are often in arrears, and classes take place in rooms with crumbling walls, dirt floors and no plumbing. Teachers in Tajikistan earn \$12 per month with bribes increasing for higher grades or more prestigious programs like the Medical University in Dushanbe.⁷⁷ In Turkmenistan, budget cuts led to the elimination of an entire grade, ostensibly to be replaced by a year learning vocational skills as an apprentice. This is a fiction since there are no apprenticeships outside of the drug and sex trade. With funds so limited, the state is precluded from delivering educational programs in multiple languages, which has developed as an additional source of tension

among nationalities. Any optimism for near-term improvement springs from the growing role of foreign investment, IGOs, and NGOs. The Peace Corps, in particular, has an impressive and highly regarded presence in Kyrgyzstan. The American University in Bishkek also offers a strong, diverse program that is supplying Kyrgyzstan with a new intellectual class that is not dominated by governmental elite.

Fading Hopes. Leaning across the massive oak bar of The Pub in Bishkek, Lena sighs deeply and explains, “I study to become a nurse, but I may not find work. Many of the hospitals have closed and patients have no money. Even if I am a lucky one, I can make more in a week behind the bar than in a month as a nurse.” The optimism of 1991 is waning. A complex combination of corruption and incompetence as well as the structural legacies of a defunct communist system undermine most prospects for progress. The situation, however, has yet to descend to such a desperate level that socio-economic deprivation can generate violence on its own. Moreover, grass roots organizations, such as the *makhallas* in Uzbekistan, have taken the place of the state to ensure families have sufficient food and water. Unless current regimes weed out corruption and embrace difficult reforms, such as the privatization of collective farms, the region is unlikely to turn the corner. Until then, the ranks of the unemployed and uneducated youth will grow along with disillusionment and even anger. Will the young girl in the tattered yellow dress still be selling cigarettes in five years, or will she have moved on to a more lucrative heroin trade?

Closing Shots

Violence grows where desperation lingers. At the individual level, the majority of peoples in Central Asia struggle to survive,

growing increasingly dissatisfied with their existing leadership. That said, over seventy years of Soviet domination and ten years of indigenous authoritarianism have engendered a political and social passivity that restrains collective violence. In comparison to the paranoia of the Soviet era, even the authoritarian rule of Turkmenbashi can be sold as “freedom.” Moreover, the economic retardation caused by Soviet planning still serves as a source of blame to deflect criticism from present failings. Nonetheless, individual attitudes are slowly sliding toward a resentment that cannot be pacified through state coercion or pleas for patience. With the state failing, non-state identity groups are gaining prominence as a socio-economic provider. Even NGOs like Counter-Part Consortium, funded in part by the US Agency for International Development, bypass state bureaucracies to work directly with these non-state actors in an effort to provide basic health and educational services. Identity cleavages are deepened as identity groups vie for scarce resources, jobs, and services. For the most part, this competition has been peaceful; however, incidents of non-state violence have precedent and are likely to grow in frequency as the roots of violence become more acute. Standing next to the Turkmen father, watching solemnly as another Ashgabat apartment building crumbled, we sensed not only resignation, but a simmering rage.

TRANSFORMATION TO VIOLENCE

Bukhara Dispatch: *The glass beer bottle skids across a crowded dance floor and shatters against a table. Shouting drowns out the blaring Uzbek dance music, as two men, probably in their early twenties, exchange punches under the shifting colored lights and flashing disco ball. A second bottle cracks, drawing everyone's attention to the escalating fight. Swinging wildly, clearly in a drugged frenzy, one of the men slashes the other across the chest. Blood flows. Patrons retreat to their tables. It takes the police*

several minutes to reach this disco on the roof of the Old Bukhara Hotel, which is a popular hangout for local students. After the men have been detained, an inquiry reveals the underlying catalysts. According to several patrons, the men recently graduated from the local university. They are unemployed, addicted to heroin, and part of a growing number of local street gangs. This is not the first fight here, and it is unlikely to be the last. As we side step the bloodstained floor for a view of Bukhara's night, the towering minaret of the central madraseh is a stark reminder that this ancient town was once the world's center of Islamic scholarship and birthplace of the mystical Sufi faith.

Engines of Change

Violent collective action on a widespread scale is rarely the spontaneous outgrowth of the roots of violence. The roots create the conditions and shape individuals to be ripe for mobilization. The aggressive Bukharan youth is most likely the product of these conditions; however, his response is most likely limited to disco brawls or even the occasional street gang violence. For mobilization into a VNSA to actually occur, there must be a transformational process. Our open systems framework provides visual insight to the key relational dynamics. First, the state must fail him. As the legitimate governing authority, the state is the recipient of his expectations for education, employment, and security. This failure can take the form of incapacity to provide basic services or effectively allocate resources and/or it can manifest as an excessively coercive response. Second, there must exist identity cleavages to redirect and absorb his searching loyalties. Finally, there must be some sort of catalyst to mobilize an identity group, possibly transforming it into a full-fledged VNSA.

These three engines of change are fueled by environmental factors. Globalization improves access to resources and information as discussed earlier, which frustrates state efforts to control

activities within the confines of their territory. Globalization is often the primary vehicle for external support, as it provides the modern conveniences of wire-transfers of money, cellular phone communications, internet connectivity, and the like; however, more traditional activities, such as simple cross-border smuggling, remain popular in the region. Other environmental factors, such as external players (both states and diasporas), can exercise a high degree of influence, providing strategic direction, financial resources, training, and safe haven for mobilizing identity groups. The IMU, for example, routinely retreats to Afghanistan for training before launching new attacks in the Ferghana Valley and Tashkent. The Uighar Diaspora, principally in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan, smuggles weapons into the Xinjiang Province of Western China in an effort to create an independent Eastern Turkestan. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are known to provide direct support to the IMU and other Wahabi groups, while Iran has a stake in the protection of Shi'a communities throughout the region.

The transformational process is not linear. The actions of VNSAs can have reinforcing effects, perpetuating the cycle of violence. While it is true that some VNSAs do act with the intent of improving their communities or for some perceived public good, the groups we are focused on generally pursue narrow, post-heroic objectives. That is, they seek to increase their wealth, gain control over important, often illegal, networks, or to exert power over another group. To this end, they benefit by the deepening of the roots of violence, which in turn increases their recruiting pool. These VNSAs also thrive on the margins of state authority and civil society influence. By reinforcing the cycle of violence, they gain greater autonomy of action. State coercion may constrain their

growth in the short-term, but over the long run it serves to legitimize the warlord's violent response.

Failures of Governance

The state, at least theoretically, is the grand arbiter of conflict of all types within its borders—it sets up and administers the rules by which everyone plays. A fully sovereign state controls all matters of governance, administrative control, and most importantly, holds ultimate and monopolistic command and control of the means of coercion, both of its citizens within its borders and entities outside its borders.⁷⁸ With such power come certain responsibilities, and more importantly, expectations and desires on the part of the citizenry. Citizens desire safety and security, a relatively equal application of justice, and a generally legitimate distribution of goods and resources. When a government or state consistently fails to deliver such conditions, either because it is incapable of doing so or because it made the conscious choice to not do so, the sectors of its populace affected by such a failure begin to view the state as less and less legitimate—and thus the first step in the failure of governance is taken.

Should such a deprived sector of the populace begin to act on its disaffections, three general options exist for the state: (1) have political structures in place wherein groups can make grievances, and some sort of attempt at redress can take place; (2) the state decides to simply ignore the disaffected portion of the population, and do nothing; or (3) the state can turn to its tools of coercion in an attempt to silence, stifle or even destroy that sector of the populace.

If states have redress structures that the disaffected portion of the populace perceives as legitimate, VNSA mobilization is difficult at best. In other words, if the accommodative capacity of the state

is sufficient to absorb or co-opt disaffected portions of the population, then the state will maintain enough legitimacy to avoid potential VNSA mobilization. This accommodative capacity can be a measure of access to government structures, inclusion of members of most important groups and organizations within the state's borders, and the flexibility of the state bureaucracy to adequately respond to necessary minor changes.

Should a state simply do nothing, however, VNSA mobilization is possible, although not necessarily immediate. A state that ignores a disaffected portion of the population typically does so for two possible reasons: (1) it has an incapacity to act, or (2) it chooses not to act, as redressing the grievances of the disaffected group could cause (at least in the state's calculus) an even greater disaffection among other sectors of the population, or more likely, among elites in the state. Inaction due to either reason still does not void the fact that state apathy is much less a mass motivator than wide-spread coercion. For VNSA mobilization to be possible in the face of state apathy, severe problems, extended lack of attention, or several instances of obvious punitive state apathy (i.e. a natural disaster affecting a specific sector of the population that the state refuses to respond to) before significant VNSA mobilization will become possible. As such, a state with even a mediocre accommodative capacity that simply does nothing in the face of a disaffected population will not have to face significant or widespread VNSA mobilization.

It is when the state makes the third choice that disaffected groups have the greatest potential for VNSA mobilization. A state will make this choice for a variety of reasons—the challenge posed by the disaffected population is above an acceptable threshold (as

deemed by the state), the existing order is in danger, elites feel threatened, or the state has such a low accommodative capacity little disagreement is allowed. Whatever the reason, however, the civil society of that given state is fractured—sectors of that civil society obviously view the state system, which decides the distribution of goods, resources, safety, security, justice, etc. as illegitimate. As such, the state can no longer count on the fabric of shared values or consensus to hold the state together; the basis of state authority in such situations then shifts to the unstable solution of state coercion.⁷⁹

Failure of governance begins when populations (either in whole or in substantial parts) perceive their state no longer adequately functions. Failure of governance exists depending on how the state responds to that loss of legitimacy. If a state continues to be unable to meet its population's expectations beyond that population's tolerance threshold, or if a state resorts to significant coercion of its population, a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for VNSA mobilization exists. Thus, it is possible to move to the second dynamic of our transformational model.

Identity Cleavages

With failures in governance resulting in a loss of regime legitimacy and undermining the notion of “citizenry,” identity cleavages are serving to absorb the wandering loyalties of a disaffected citizenry. These identity cleavages are the nucleus around which VNSA recruit members and develop group cohesion. Some of the most complicated identity issues in the world are found in Central Asia. While much literature regarding identity conflict is based exclusively on ethnicity, this is only part of the Central Asia

Republics' identity puzzle. Other pieces include economic, regional, and religious identities.

Before an examination of each of these major identity cleavages begins, the authors wish to point out this effort does not subscribe to the primordialist approach to identity, even when discussing ethnic identity. The primordialist approach essentially states sociological groupings exist in a society based on natural differences—physical, biological, and racial—which then become the criteria for social judgment and differentiation. Such an approach inevitably leads one to conclude that conflict is essentially a return to primitivism, and nothing can be done.⁸⁰ While the definition of “ethnic group” the authors use includes the phrase “biologically self-propagating,” identity (even ethnic identities) is much more than physical and biological differences. This caveat will be discussed further in the “Identity Mobilization” section.

Ethnic Identity Cleavages: According to Frederick Barth, a scholar on social organizations and interaction, an “ethnic group” designates a people that is predominantly biologically self-propagating, that holds a common set of fundamental values, that constitutes a field of interaction and communication, and that has a membership that identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category that can be distinguished from other categories of the same order.⁸¹ Importantly, the continued existence of these groups is dependent upon the establishment and maintenance of social, cultural, religious, and sometimes geographic boundaries by which they define themselves and are defined as distinct by others.

Under the autocratic rule of the Soviet system, ethnic groups were suppressed in favor of creating the Soviet Man. While some

expressions of nationalism or ethnicity were allowed, they were the rare exception rather than the proverbial rule. Consequently, the desire to propagate one's own ethnic group, thereby creating the necessary boundaries to do so, was rare. This has changed significantly. In the post-Soviet vacuum, ethnic groups are emerging—and thus asserting or reasserting the norms and values that define them. How and to what extent these norms and values are exerted have a critical impact on the mobilization of populations and the creation of VNSAs.

The ethnic portion of identity in Central Asia contains at least five parts. While this fragmented background of identity certainly provides the individual many allegiances outside the state from which to choose, these same cross-cutting cleavages can complicate identity-based mobilization. Competing identities may frustrate the efforts of other identity groups.

The Citizen: The first aspect of identity in Central Asia is nation-state citizenship. Efforts are underway by the various governments to formally codify state boundaries and solidify notions of citizenship. This attempt cuts across the grain of Central Asia culture and history, and the act of “creating” (or re-creating, depending on one's view) the state and citizenship is by definition creating tension and unease.

A bit of history is necessary here. According to Dr. Igor Torbakov, a Russian historian, the ideas of an ethnic identity, statehood, citizenship or nationality were largely alien to the peoples of Central Asia. Indeed, as late as 1927, Vasiliy Barthold, Moscow's leading specialist in Oriental affairs, stated "The settled peoples of Central Asia regard themselves first as Muslims and then as inhabitants of any given town or region; ethnic concepts having

virtually no significance in their eyes."⁸² It was only under the Soviet program of "national delimitation" (*natsional'noe razmezhevaniye*) that occurred in 1924-1925, where swaths of formerly undemarcated Asian territory were turned into Soviet Socialist Republics and given titular names, that the political creations now known Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan came into being. However, these "creations" did little to create eponymous identities, as Soviet policies were strictly from Moscow and (as stated earlier) ethnic expressions were largely suppressed.⁸³

In the wake of the Soviet collapse, the Communist Party leaders who inherited their respective Soviet Socialist Republic immediately faced the task of nation building. This task was approached in a variety of ways—demarcating boundaries (in Uzbekistan's case, unilaterally), relaying historiographies, establishing national heroes, political elites attempting to be the most important in the region, and competing for once-shared resources, etc. This process of getting individuals living within the boundaries of these new political creatures to swear their loyalty to them has proved difficult. For example, some governments are requiring their citizens to identify ethnicity on passports—"citizens" understand that if their ethnicity does not match their citizenship, they will be discriminated against. Thus, most minorities are now forced to administratively deny their ethnic identity. These nation-building efforts have created certain external instabilities as well. Once dormant border disputes are now serious points of contention between governments, resources are now weapons (as was illustrated in the "Resource Scarcity" section), and national leaders

consistently fight for the spotlight on the international scene instead of focusing on greater regional cooperation.

These policies are having an overall detrimental effect. Any attempt to create an “us” necessarily creates a “them.” Again, to quote Torbakov, “efforts by both countries to forge distinct identities in the post-Soviet era are a source of considerable friction between peoples who have co-existed relatively peacefully in the same region for centuries.”⁸⁴ These efforts, coupled with the emergence of other boundaries, will significantly contribute to the emergence of VNSAs.

The Nation: A second, but closely related identity cleavage, is the “nation” half of nation-state. As opposed to the period before Russian colonization and Soviet annexation, awareness of national identity is now an established social practice in the region. As is often the legacy in recently de-colonized areas, the newly independent populace embraces ethnicity as a significant and legitimate category of assessment—a phenomenon the Hutu-Tutsi rivalry in Rwanda and Burundi illustrates horrifyingly well. To the authors’ untrained eye, only the largest of ethnic differences could be discerned; the locals, however, could go so far as to identify the city or village of origin for a casual passer-by. Discrimination, especially in the militaries of these countries, is now rampant; individuals who do not speak the ethnic language of their country are often singled out for harassment and punishment.⁸⁵ The codification of the nation-state mix is illustrated by examining an Uzbek passport—clearly, the holder of an Uzbek passport is an Uzbek citizen, but “nationality” is an additional required identifier on the passport. For a group of peoples where Muslim identity traditionally masked ethnic differences, such an awareness of

ethnicity coupled with a very adolescent but active desire and ability to use ethnicity to meet various political purposes can be dangerous.

Perhaps more ominous is the increasing trend of “nationalizing,” or the attempt to make the nation and state coterminous. Kazakhstan provides an excellent example of “nationalizing” policies, which aim to promote the Kazakhs, while assimilating, marginalizing, or expelling non-dominant ethnic groups. For example, although nearly everyone in Kazakhstan speaks Russian, the “official language,” the “state language” is Kazakh. While the difference between these two terms is vague and uncertain, other laws have more concrete effects—stipulating phasing-in of exclusive use of Kazakh for state employees, for example. Linguists and sociologists alike point out that even 25% of ethnic Kazakhs speak Russian as their first language; only those communities that resisted Russification during Soviet times are still using Kazakh as their first language.⁸⁶ Using such preferences has the effect of staffing the government bureaucracy almost entirely of ethnically aware Kazakhs. While many other such laws and programs exist which structurally favor Kazakhs over non-Kazakhs (especially Russians), this example makes the point—laws are creating new winners and losers in Kazakhstan, and individuals are placed in each category based on their ethnicity.

The effects of Kazakhstan’s nationalizing programs are visible. A clear indicator of early mobilization among Russians is their massive out-migration, with estimates showing that from 1989-1999 over 1.5 million Russians, or 25% of the Russian population of Kazakhstan, left the country permanently. Many of the remaining Russians moved to the highly Russified areas of Kazakhstan—in the

north and east, close to the Russian border. A second visible effect is the emergence of largely Russian groups and political movements in northern Kazakhstan that actually have secessionist goals. While these groups are small (so far), their influence may be limited more by state actions (such as media restrictions, constraints on their ability to meet and organization) and a lack of support from Russia than as a reflection of low resonance among the population.⁸⁷ While such measures may be effective in keeping Russian irredentism capped in the short term, they will only add to mobilization effects over the long term.

Such nationalizing actions are observable from each of the five Central Asian Republics. Saparmurat Niyazov, the president of Turkmenistan, proclaimed himself leader of all Turkmen and declared the 21st Century to be the Golden Age of the Turkmen. Other slogans, splashed over everything (to include buildings, airliners, and mountainsides) proclaim “Halk! Watan! Turkmenbashi!” loosely translated as “The People! The Land! The Leader of all Turkmen!” Such popular pronouncements definitely promote Turkmen nationalism; however, one could not fault non-Turkman citizens for feeling uneasy going into the new Golden Century. Even the Tajiks, with perhaps the most difficult job of creating a state, are attempting to build their nation around the old Saminid dynasty.

These two aspects of identity cleavages become all the more difficult given Josef Stalin’s population mixing programs of the 1920s. Stalin removed all Koreans on the Russian and Korean border and relocated them in the Ferghana Valley and central Uzbekistan. Moreover, Stalin gerrymandered the political boundaries of the Ferghana Valley so it would be divided between

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan—all in an effort to divide the Muslim population there. Large numbers of Russians, and to a lesser degree Ukrainians, and Belorussians were sent to the new Soviet Socialist Republics to help the natives conform to the requirements of socialism. Later in Soviet history, many of the German and Japanese soldiers captured in World War II were relocated to Central Asia, and their descendents still live there. The resulting mixture of ethnicities is startling, and it certainly makes a walk around the various bazaars in the region exceptionally interesting. In the Fergana Valley city of Osh, Kyrgyzstan, there are at least 83 nationalities.⁸⁸

The Region: The third dimension of ethnic identity is the meta-state or supra-state identity. This is an affinity to those that have broad, generally similar histories, share a religion, and/or come from a similar linguistic family. The region is divided (both by population, and increasingly geographically, as the various groups settle into more homogenous “sub-communities” and diasporas) into those who come from a Muslim cultural heritage and those who do not, and those who are Turkic and those who are not. A Muslim cultural heritage, for example, would group Uzbeks and Tajiks together, but separate Russian, Ukrainians, and German individuals. A Turkic meta-identity, for example, would focus on shared linguistic roots, grouping Uzbeks and Turkmen, but marginalizing Kazakhs, Koreans, Ukrainians, and Russians.⁸⁹

The Tribe and Clan: A fourth ethnic identity cleavage in Central Asia is the clan or tribal identity. Within Turkmenistan, for example, there are five tribes, but three dominant ones: the Tekke in the center, the Ersary on the eastern Afghan border, and the Yomud in the west.⁹⁰ While President Niyazov has gone to great lengths to

erase tribal identity, it still exists—Turkmen will only marry within their own tribe, and will also typically hire within their own tribe.⁹¹ Only three generations ago, these tribes were distinct separate social, political and economic entities often in conflict with one another; only since becoming a Soviet Socialist Republic were these tribes tied together by the uncomfortable cord of a state boundary. Kazakhstan provides another excellent example of the sub-national identity; these once nomadic people categorize themselves by *zhuz* or *ordas* (tribal confederations), and then through *ru* and *taipa* (clans and tribes). These identities continued through the Soviet era, and they retain some level of importance after independence.⁹²

The Civilization: A fifth cleavage is Huntington's classical civilization fault lines. If our system of conflict is truly open, actors who are not physically in Central Asia but have influence there must be considered. Central Asia is the intersection of several civilization fault lines—one between the Muslim and Sinic civilizations, along the Muslim and Slavic/Orthodox civilizations, and one along the European/Muslim civilizations. The proximity of the Muslim/Buddhist fault line must also be mentioned. China and Russia both have political, economic, and security interests in the area. India has an additional indirect interest in the area due to its conflict with Islamic militants over Jammu and Kashmir, in addition to its continuing struggle with Pakistan.

Economic Identity Cleavages: The emergence of economic elites since the collapse of communism created another class of identity—economic elites. While corruption and the Communist Party system in the former Soviet Union obviously thwarted the Marxist notion of equality, the disparity between rich and poor witnessed in the region is orders of magnitude greater than anything

seen in the USSR—and the difference continues to grow. Given the recent “decolonized” status of the Central Asian Republics, the identity of economic elite and the poor are of great importance. As Martha Brill Olcott asserts,

The prospects of social and political instability are also more pronounced. Decolonization has always provided enormous economic opportunities for the new political winners, but the totality of the economic transformation is something quite new, and in the post-Soviet states the losers—be they the masses or among the political elite—have little or no economic assets to fall back on, because private property was virtually non-existent under the Soviet system.⁹³

The emergence and solidification of such economic strata can certainly make populations more vulnerable to exploitation. As Drs. Fiona Hill and John Shoenberger recently testified at the Open Society Institute in New York, poverty is a—perhaps the—critical ingredient in the increasing violent tension in Central Asia.⁹⁴ According to The Central Asia Project, another program sponsored by the Open Society Institute, stratification of economic elites can create instability as well. In the post-independence chaos, wealth accumulated in a very select group of hands.⁹⁵ The emergence of such a small group of prosperous elite left the majority of Central Asians below the poverty line. While this level of poverty grinds the population down, certain elites continue to gain wealth—a recipe for at least widespread resentment, or possibly widespread violence. The International Crisis Group concludes:

there is a sharply growing disparity between the narrow elite, which benefits appreciably from privatization and other market reforms, and the larger part of the population, which is being driven towards economic desperation. Even more worrying, there are significant sub-regions and

localities in [Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan] where the situation is so [economically] dire for the vast majority of the population that patience is beginning to evaporate and unrest to grow sharply. While most Central Asians have been steadfastly passive in the face of post-Soviet upheaval, indications are increasing in some localities that a breaking point is near. If it is reached, spontaneous uprising or organized underground political activity, increasing militancy, and a readiness to seek the overthrow of current regimes can all be anticipated. The most dangerous social force is a desperate population that has little to lose.⁹⁶

Another potential avenue for violence springs from economic identities in the form of the loss of the middle class. Examples from other states suggest that a small middle class in such skewed wealth distributions typically does not survive—a trend that unfortunately is being confirmed throughout Central Asia. The erosion of the middle class makes that particular caste prey for radical groups; in our case, VNSAs. As Alisher Ilkhamov, a 2000 IREX fellow at Harvard University stated, “the IMU not only appeals to the impoverished peasants of the Ferghana Valley, but also to a significant number of Uzbekistan’s’ shrinking middle class.”⁹⁷

Regionalist Identity Cleavages: The third class of identity in Central Asia is regionalism. Central Asians do not have a long tradition of loyalty to a state. Loyalty, if anything, is to the extended family and locality. Outside ethnic identities, this tradition of “locality” or “regionalism” is strong force. Any discussion of regionalism must begin with the fractured “state” of Tajikistan. While identity cleavages played a large part, regional issues were the main driver in the bitter civil war. The northern faction based largely in Khojand (formerly Leninabad), the

Kulyabis from the southern province, radical Islamic militants (with influence from neighboring Afghanistan) from Kurgan-Tyube and the Garm Valley, and the Parmiris from the Gorno-Badakhshan all fought a protracted war which left at least sixty thousand dead. Despite power-sharing agreements, problems remain.

While Tajikistan may be marginally stronger than just after independence, its “statehood” can be considered *de facto* in nature. Little federal government control extends beyond the edges of Dushanbe. The IMU operates freely in the country, the international drug trade is well established (especially in the west), and Tajikistan has shown little ability to control its own borders. Furthermore, despite the 1997 General Peace Agreement that called for the disarming and disbanding of the United Tajik Opposition, the United Nations estimates approximately 2,400 armed (and unemployed) Islamic militants remain in their Karategin and Tavildara Valley strongholds.⁹⁸ Indeed, a 2001 Human Rights Watch report on Tajikistan reported a great deal of regional and clan-based violence occurring, inferring most of it was due to the parliamentary elections on February 27th, 2000 that were labeled “fraudulent” by both Human Rights Watch and the OSCE observers.⁹⁹ Tajikistan descending into another region-based civil war, or more likely, continue to slide closer and closer to simply being a state in name only (similar to Somalia in the 1990s), is not an unreasonable prediction.

The regionalism extends to the Ferghana Valley, where gerrymandering has divided the Valley among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, leaving small autonomous enclaves to dot the extreme western tip of Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan administers Vorukh, while Uzbekistan administers Sokh and Shakhimardan, all

completely surrounded by sovereign Kyrgyz territory. With a scant few miles of Kyrgyz territory separating these areas from their contiguous mother country, identity cleavages could easily invite armed intervention by any of these countries to secure territory.

Kyrgyzstan, once the darling of the West due to President Akaev's initial verbal commitments to freedom and economic reform, is a state in slow deterioration as well. Bishkek is nearly at the mercy of its more powerful surrounding neighbors, primarily Uzbekistan and China. Uzbekistan especially has used its military to set the border between itself and Bishkek, to the detriment of many Kyrgyz villagers in the south—an area witnessing a great deal of violence in 1990. This, coupled with an increase in organized crime and the drug trade, suggests Kyrgyzstan could also fall into *de facto* statehood, where regional warlords rule at their whim.

Uzbekistan, arguably the strongest of all the Central Asian states, faces its own problems. Two of the most beautiful cities in the country, Samarkand and Bukhara, host over 700,000 Tajiks and were historically considered part of Tajik territory; indeed, as late as 1989, Dushanbe was attempting to convince Soviet leadership to return these two areas.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, conversations with “ordinary citizens” in these two cities clearly leave one with the notion they identify themselves more with their city (or perhaps, in their mind, their khanate) than they do with the state of Uzbekistan.

Other regional cleavages in Uzbekistan exist as well. The further west and away from Tashkent one travels, the further this sub-state identity grows. The western end of the country takes this trend to its logical conclusion: the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the largest “province” in Uzbekistan, received a semi-autonomous status in December 1991. The Karakalpaks have their own separate

constitution, their own separate political structures, and have a distinct language and culture separate from the rest of Uzbekistan. While separatist rumblings are not yet loud, they do exist.

Kazakhstan is also facing regionalist threats that coincide with ethnic tensions. Russia has accepted the notion of Kazakh sovereignty much more quickly and completely than most observers anticipated; however, many Russian nationalists still call for a Russian absorption of the Kazakh steppe, and the dwindling Russian population still largely dominates the vast border between Kazakhstan and Russia. For the time being, Russia seems to be content with maintaining a near monopoly over transporting Almaty's vast gas and oil wealth. Should Russian politics change, or if the Kazakh state continues to erode, the secessionist intentions of these Russians could lead to Russia absorbing its Diaspora in the southern near abroad, thus fracturing the state and leading to other possible secessionist movements in the eastern extremes.

The contest between loyalty to traditional regions versus the loyalty to the adolescent state will come soon. All five Central Asian Republics will face power transitions soon. This transition will take place over a population that not only has older citizens who may have a closer affinity to their respective region, but also the younger generations who have reached political maturity since independence, but are frustrated by the political and economic stagnation endemic to all the Republics. Against this backdrop, continued statehood is anything but guaranteed. Martha Brill Olcott argues that unlike five years ago when each of the five Central Asian Republics were exploring ways to properly exercise their sovereignty, now all are exploring ways to maintain their sovereignty.¹⁰¹ We do not intend to suggest the Central Asian

Republics will split apart along regional lines, creating multiple states where five exist now; further “Balkanization” of this former Soviet-controlled area is unlikely. A more likely scenario is that these states will maintain limited sovereignty, while in reality they will erode into geographic areas controlled by local warlords with little, if any, central government control.¹⁰²

Religious Identity Cleavages: The Muslim community, or *umma*, of Central Asia emerged after seventy-four years of totalitarian administration to find itself part of nationalist struggles for independence. With the Islamic awakening came regional and Western anxieties over the possibility of a fundamentalist revolution based on an Iranian model. The *umma* also became a target and object of concern for varied foreign powers seeking to establish influence. Although the revolution did not materialize, external efforts to shape the *umma* persist. Despite renewed international interest in Central Asia, current examinations have failed to sufficiently delineate the cleavages of the Muslim community.

Islam has been integral in defining the culture, political behavior and economic interaction of Central Asians since the Arab invasion in the seventh century. Hence, its resurgence is neither surprising, nor unintelligible. The current revival has its roots in glasnost, perestroika, and the collapse of the Soviet empire, and it takes place in a community of over 50 million Muslims. Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school, or *madraseh*, are an overwhelming majority (70%), although approximately 1.5 million Sunni's follow the Shafi'i *madraseh*. Other religious groupings include Sufis, Twelver (Ja'farite), Shi'ites, Ismailis, and Bahais. Despite diversity, the *umma* has remained relatively homogenous. Although Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are historically ambivalent, this traditional

enmity was dampened in the region due to shared resistance to Russian and Soviet rule. Indeed, both Sunni and Shi'a delegations to the 1905 Third Congress of Muslims in Russia declared Ja'farite Shi'ism as a fifth legal school, equivalent to the Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi'i madrasehs.¹⁰³

Alternative Islamic Cleavages: Although cleavages in Islam are often examined as a function of dominant sect, branch or school, the *umma's* fissures in Central Asia can better be understood on four levels. The first is at the grassroots level, which can be examined in degrees of "religiosity," a term corresponding to the observance of Islamic traditions.¹⁰⁴ Covertly organized communities and Sufi brotherhoods also functioned at this sub-national level. The Islamic establishments of the ex-Soviet regime and current authoritarian regimes operate on another level. Political-religious movements can be considered on a fourth level and are the focus of more detailed analysis in our section on VNSAs.

Despite bans on unofficial religious activity, Islam received widespread allegiance at the grassroots level during the Soviet period. This, so-called "Parallel" Islam remains active today. Expressed in terms of religiosity, this unorganized activity can be readily observed as a function of life-cycle rituals. Various studies have revealed the extensive observance of religious rites to include circumcision, religious burials, marriage, and the payment of the bride price, or *kalym*. Other commonly practiced rituals include observing *Ramadan* (the month of fasting), *Bairam* (the feast of sacrifice), and *Mawlud* (communal prayers celebrating the date of Mohammad's birth).¹⁰⁵ Moreover, many take to wearing religious symbols, painting Quranic verses on their automobiles, and giving their children distinctly Islamic names. One of the most extensive

and overt practices is the pilgrimage to various holy places, of which there are many. Bukhara and Samarkand in particular were centers for Islamic learning over a several century period.

Parallel Islam revolves around loosely organized communities, which follow an unofficial mullah or highly structured Sufi brotherhoods called *tariqas* (the path leading to God). Sufi brotherhoods date back to the eleventh century and exert substantial influence over public opinion. Two *tariqas* are the most prevalent; the Naqshbandi, originating in Bukhara, and the Qadiri, founded in Baghdad. They advocate both the spiritual advancement of individual Muslims and the establishment of Allah's rule on earth through the *umma*. One might consider, however, that the mystical and personal nature of Sufism is less conducive to political activity than other sects such as Shi'ism.

Only Sunni and Shi'a Islam were officially recognized by the Soviet Union and only to the extent that they submitted to state control. This trend has continued under current regimes. The state appoints the overall spiritual head, the Mufti of Tashkent for example, as well as imams and mullah at prominent mosques and *madrasehs*. Official Islam is tasked with regulating religious activity, operating official mosques, supervising religious publications, and directing the educational institutions in a manner consistent with governmental policies. To many, these co-opted religious leaders are illegitimate because their loyalty is to the state. A more recent phenomenon has been the emergence of political-religious movements. Although many consider these new "revolutionaries" to be the inheritors of the Basmachi opposition in the 1920s, they represent a unique reaction to contemporary conditions. The politisation of Islam also reflects a symbiosis

between nationalism and religion. These movements form the nucleus of Islam's role in the current situation.¹⁰⁶ The dynamic composition of the Central Asian *umma* contributes to its tenacity. Official Islam, which allowed for limited expression, is supplemented by other modes of activity. Parallel Islam provides the basis for popular action in the event the current regime and Official Islam prove insufficient in meeting the *umma's* religious demands.

Politicizing Islam: Islam is directly involved in the unfolding political process, which serves to deepen the four cleavages. At independence, Islam quickly became inextricably linked with the nationalist movements. Prominent scholar, Ahmed Rashid, makes the point that Islam has become a convenient symbol "which allows local nationalists to distance themselves from Slavic culture and aspirations."¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, it is also intertwined with inter-ethnic conflict. Many of the communist leaders in power prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union, with the lone exception of Kyrgyzstan, retain prominent government positions. According to some experts, Islam may be the only force strong enough to overcome the continued monopolization of power by these ex-Soviets.

External powers also seek to influence the relationship between the *umma* and the state. Turkey, capitalizing on shared linguistic traits with all Central Asians except Tajiks, offers a secular model with a market economy. Its efforts are directed at the current leaders, the new middle class, and the indigenous intelligentsia. Iran continues to export its revolutionary ideology, although its influence is primarily directed at Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Iranian influence is more prominent in Tajikistan since

both speak a version of Persian, or farsi, and because there are approximately 100,000 Ismailis living in the Badakhshan region.¹⁰⁸ Like that from Iran, Saudi Arabian influence is directed at grassroots activity and a growing Wahabi movement (examined in the VNSA analysis later in this paper). The Wahabi movement is currently the most potent in the region, and the source of a highly conservative theology embraced by religious VNSAs. There have also been strong linkages between this movement, centered in the Ferghana Valley, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The rivalry between Pakistan and India has overflowed into the region, with both seeking extensive trade linkages.

The political-religious movements can be classified according to their objectives. The first, often termed "fundamentalist," seeks the establishment of an Islamic republic based on Islamic law, or *shari'a*. Generally speaking, these movements are led by the previously non-registered mullahs and the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). The second, coined "secularists," advocate the establishment of a secular state, but with Islam playing some major, but non-political role. The remnants of Official Islam tend to prefer this option, as do numerous unregistered clerics and some moderate ex-communist leaders. A third political grouping seeks to prevent any official role for Islam in government and in society. Its advocates are primarily the reactionary ex-communists and remaining European and Russian settlers. There has also been widespread speculation over pan-Islam and pan-Turkic ideologies. Given the widespread ethnic diversity and conflict, accentuated by state-specific nationalism, any pan-movement is destined to failure. This typology suggests that the political process can be seen as a

struggle for power between the fundamentalists, secularists, and the current regime.

Summary: If one could draw a multi-dimensional map, which juxtaposed political, ethnic, national, religious, sub-national, and civilization demarcations simultaneously, the resulting jumble would illustrate how fractured this part of the world truly is. For example, the eastern part of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and the Xinjiang province of China (political entities) are populated by the Uighars (a Turkic nationality), which (according to Huntington) straddles the fault line between the Sinic and Muslim civilizations, contains several subnationalities, but is a subset of the meta-state Muslim/Turkic identity. Intermingled in this largely Uighar-populated area are Russians, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Germans, Tartars, and Belorussians, in addition to the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. For China, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan to be able to convince all those different identities at all levels to stay faithful subjects of the state would be a difficult task indeed.

Indeed, a thorough examination of all the competing identity cleavages in Central Asia makes the political borders drawn in the area seem insignificant. While some effort is underway to formally demarcate them, the borders in Central Asia are best described by Alexi Maleshenko as “virtual in the sense that they are less a matter of physical demarcation and more a function of what people in the region think them to be.”¹⁰⁹ The multiple “other” borders rarely coincide with administrative borders; governments typically will focus much of their energy defending such administrative borders, while non-state actors often see such borders are mere inconveniences. Such multi-dimension identities coupled with multi-dimension borders, with various groups holding differing

levels of importance to differing demarcations, certainly creates conditions conducive to conflict between non-state actors.

Identity Mobilization

Should a state be perceived as illegitimate by a given sector of society, and should an identity cleavage (or cleavages) exist which coincides with (and therefore reinforces) that disaffected sector of society, then the third dynamic of the transformational process applies. This portion of the model seeks to explain how such disaffected, reinforced groups decide to mobilize, especially resorting to violent means to achieve their ends. The authors wholeheartedly agree with the minority (although growing) voice in the social sciences when dealing with ethnic violence, and apply the same logic to identity violence writ-large: large-scale violence is not a phenomenon that spontaneously ignites in the bosoms of thousands of individuals simultaneously, thus resulting in group action. Rather, a specific and careful set of conditions (two ingredients which are already analyzed) must exist before any group can be mobilized. The ingredients necessary for this third stage of the transformation model include an “identity entrepreneur,” which must “create” or “reinforce” the identity that now stands opposed to the state, necessary resources for such a mobilization must be available, and some element of organization must exist for the mobilization to be successful.

An “identity entrepreneur” is simply an individual, typically a charismatic voice that appeals to the emotional (rather than rational), who finds it desirable to create or reinforce group identities.¹¹⁰ This can be done by highlighting (or in many instances embellishing or even creating) injustices to the identity group, myth-creation about the significance of the group in other

times or places, and bringing the borders between the “us” (those in the identity group) and “them” (those outside the identity group, most typically the “enemy”) into sharper focus. Most identity entrepreneurs are not associated with a state, as was the case with Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia; most are associated with a non-state organization, with the state or another identity group. Abdullah Ocalan of the Kurdish Worker’s Party, a Kurdish identity group violently fighting the Turkish state, is an excellent example. Other variations of the identity entrepreneur exist: Vladimir Zhirinovksy is a Russian identity entrepreneur who attempted to use the Russian state to assume power, but failed; Osama bin Laden is an identity entrepreneur for radical Islam, with the enemy being the West.

This “creation” aspect of identity mobilization stands in stark contrast to the primordialist approach to identity conflict. As mentioned earlier, the authors do not subscribe to this primitivist notion of conflict—groups fight simply because they are from different “tribes” or “clans.” While fighting often does fall along identity fissures, such competitive demarcations are coincidental to other, deeper reasons for conflict as well as falling victim to identity entrepreneurs exploitation of ethnic differences for their own selfish reasons. In other words, the transformation of identity groups to VNSA requires much more than the simple fact that identity groups exist; mythical historiographies, exaggerated claims, or embellished injustices appealing to emotion are all tasks the identity entrepreneur must successfully complete before an identity group will move to action.

Resources and organization must also be available for identity mobilization. Without these two elements, even the most determined identity entrepreneur will be unable to get his or her

message out to the intended audience, provide the necessary incentives to the appropriate individuals, or even be taken seriously. Additionally, once a small-scale group is mobilized, more resources and greater organization are necessary to expand the group, begin working towards the group's goals, and importantly, achieve at least some small short-term goals.¹¹¹

Another important element in identity mobilization is foreign influence, especially that of another state. A state may be interested in creating and mobilizing an identity group in a potential adversary state for a variety of reasons. A state's intelligence service could search for and train an appropriate identity entrepreneur, provide plenty of resources (and where possible, organization), and then use the now-mobilized identity group for its own purposes.

Applying this framework to Central Asia, several "identity entrepreneur opportunities" exist. The most obvious identity entrepreneur is the military leader of the IMU, Juma Namangani. A charismatic individual with a military background who had backing from the Al Qaeda network in Afghanistan, Namangani had all the necessary ingredients to make the IMU a full-fledged VNSA. In addition to the IMU, groups that are susceptible to mobilization once an identity entrepreneur emerges include (but are not limited to) the Uighars, the Karakalpaks, the Russians in Kazakhstan, the Pamiris, any of the Turkmen tribes after Niyazov's death, devout (not radical) Muslims, farmers threatened by drought, and disaffected military units. As state power in each of these republics erodes for a variety of reasons, the emergence of identity entrepreneurs becomes more likely, as the probability of success against such a weakened state increases.

Reinforcing Actions

Among the aspects of our open systems framework, reinforcing actions are probably the most difficult to understand without direct access to VNSA leaders. Essentially, we are proposing that the VNSAs behave in a manner that sustains, and even expands, the cycle of collective violence. Warlords recognize they can only exist in the context of a weak state. Druglords understand they can only increase their profits if the government fails to intervene or is a corrupt element in the system. Leaders of militant religious movements recognize the value of a corrupt, incapacitated state to the furtherance of their efforts to bring down a regime. Identity entrepreneurs of armed ethno-political groups are aware that they will be less successful in mobilizing based on socio-economic disparities if the state can successfully reconcile differences. Each group has a vested interest in expanding their recruiting pool and undermining state efforts to govern effectively. Because VNSAs are rarely focused on the public good, or the betterment of all society, they do not necessarily work to pull up the roots of violence. Since their foot soldiers come from the ranks of the impoverished and dispossessed, they do not have a stake in seeing this pool shrink.

VNSAs may not establish specific objectives with regard to sustaining the system; however, the nature of their activities does deepen the roots of violence whether they intend it or not. VNSAs almost always raise funds through illegal means. In Central Asia, the primary revenue generating activities are illegal marketing in drugs, guns, and people. Drugs abuse is on the rise in Central Asia, and guns are flooding the landscape. Both derail productive engagement in civil society and engender greater violence.

Collective violence has its own reinforcing effects. It now only creates a climate of fear, but it often forces the state, particularly authoritarian regimes, to divert limited resources to law enforcement and counter-insurgency/terrorism. In our analysis of VNSA types, we present evidence of these behaviors, which are at odds with the legitimate, non-violent efforts of NGOs to improve human development in Central Asia.

Closing Shots

The transformational engines in Central Asia are strong. This paper earlier introduced the incubation of an at-risk population, ready to divert loyalties from the state. The Republics are having limited success in their nationalist projects. Statues of Amir Timur in Tashkent and Manas in Bishkek have replaced Soviet party officials, but have not proved sufficient in binding the citizen to the state. The state's challenge is compounded by the varied, deep identity cleavages that stand ready to absorb loyalty. In one respect, competing cleavages can undermine cohesion around one specific identity. This does not appear to be an obstacle to mobilization in Central Asia where most VNSAs are built on multiple, reinforcing identities. Family, clan, region, religion, and socio-economic status act in a reinforcing manner that binds individuals to the respective VNSA. The Republics are losing ground in their effort to co-opt any of these groupings; indeed, they are hastening the process through failures in governance. Decreasing legitimacy and capacity are being replaced by coercion, which form the ultimate recipe for alienating a citizenry. For their part, VNSAs are capitalizing on globalization, external support, and illegal activities to increase their resource access. Identity entrepreneurs seem sufficiently plentiful to take advantage of the resources, although they are under constant

threat of harassment and imprisonment. Based on the transformational process underway, the Bukhara bar brawler is probably already along the path to identity mobilization. Today he is fighting under disco lights; tomorrow he may be committing violent acts as part of an Afghan drug network.

VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS

Ferghana Dispatch: *The scarred, muscular Uzbek soldier breaks free of the ropes binding him. Ruthlessly, he snaps the neck of a dozing guard. An axe through the skull fells a second oblivious guard, sporting an ample beard, loose robes and curved dagger. Stumbling through the rugged Pamir Mountains in the coal darkness of night, our beleaguered soldier discovers the bivouac of his fatigued unit. A tearing young woman dressed in a flowing white gown rushes to his arms, thankful he has returned from the dead . . . from the camps of the Islamic militants. As the morning sun breaks, the valiant Uzbek soldiers return to the fight while images of lost comrades float across the horizon.*

Nonconforming Threats

According to our host, the music video described here is among the most popular in Uzbekistan. It is a government production intended to sustain popular support for an on-going conflict with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Fighting during 1999 and 2000 in the Pamirs and Ferghana Valley resulted in the deaths of approximately twenty-seven Uzbek and fifty-five Kyrgyz soldiers. Operating from mountain bases in Tajikistan, the IMU engages in terrorist and guerrilla tactics in a self-proclaimed effort to establish an Islamic state. Ostensibly motivated by faith, the IMU is also reported to finance operations with funds from the Taliban in Afghanistan, narco-trafficking, small arms proliferation, and human trade. The IMU epitomizes the character and activities of a VNSA at the nucleus of regional and transnational security concerns.

VNSAs are a distinct form of non-state actor. VNSAs are organizations with an “enduring membership and specifiable authority relationships.”¹¹² Social movements, one-time demonstrations, and even revolutions do not fit within the context of our non-state actor definition. Rather, the “leaderless public” emerges out of “the separate but convergent actions of many individuals who do not share organizational membership.”¹¹³ In addition to the organizational criteria, VNSAs employ collective violence. Collective violence is really an extension of collective action, which is coordinated action by the members of the group in pursuit of common ends.¹¹⁴ Contemporary collective violence, however, reflects a disturbing divergence from the dominant orientation of the 1970s and 1980s. Many non-state actors now employ violence, or the use of physical force, for reasons other than a power struggle with the state.

In its purist form, the VNSA is sovereignty free. Although theoretically subject to state authority, non-state actors are routinely able to act with autonomy “to preserve their integrity and move toward their goals.”¹¹⁵ The absence of government control can result from state incapacity as well as complicity. This freedom of action has increased dramatically with the onset of globalization. The proliferation of non-state actors not only contributes to the erosion of state competency, but also allows VNSAs to interact directly with external states or sympathetic diasporas, which serve as sources of information and financial support.¹¹⁶ As one example, the IMU is able to routinely move guerrillas, monies, and information across the borders of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. It has even been asserted by some experts that Osama bin Laden provided direct guidance as well as

assistance to the IMU. The weaker the state, the more likely warlords leading sovereignty-free groups will fill the vacuum of authority.

VNSAs pose a beguiling threat, particularly from the western perspective, because their approach to collective violence rejects Carl Philipp Gotlieb von Clausewitz's concept of Trinitarian war. Trinitarian war is "organized mass violence" waged by the state for political ends.¹¹⁷ The instrument of the state is the army; organized, uniformed, and subordinate to the political leadership. The third element is the populace, which must be mobilized to participate and support the war. Trinitarian war is based on the Napoleonic model and remains the guiding construct for modern warfare.

VNSAs do not engage in "modern" warfare. They are not strictly post-modern or pre-modern, but rather reflect characteristics that precede the birth of the nation-state in 1648 while embracing elements of 20th Century total wars. VNSAs are certainly not states, nor do they mobilize the populace to serve in organized, hierarchical armies.¹¹⁸ Warlords mobilize various sized groups of volunteer militants and/or reimbursed mercenaries, who regularly operate in loose guerilla bands and networked cells. Like the members of the IMU, they do not wear uniforms or unit insignia. Most importantly, they do not always employ force to achieve a political end. While many VNSAs like the IMU do seek change in the political system, many employ violence for post-heroic reasons. Collective violence is often a means to eradicate a feared or hated people (ethnic cleansing), perpetuate criminal activities, protect one's turf, or perpetuate chaos in the system. In the most extreme cases, a VNSA may see violence as end itself.

The forms of collective violence and associated tactics are equally vital to our understanding of the threat. VNSAs most often engage in conspiracy violence—highly organized violence with limited participation on a small scale.¹¹⁹ Conspiracy violence can grow into internal wars as participation becomes more widespread and objectives expand to include overthrowing the regime, dissolving the state, or eradicating opposition.¹²⁰ In terms of tactics, VNSAs trend toward the asymmetric, including violent crime, guerrilla operations, terrorism, and in some rare case, cyber warfare. These tactics differ principally in scope and objectives. Violent crime is typically directed toward individuals for material gain even though it can be highly organized with multiple targets. Specific acts include shooting, stabbing, kidnapping, beating, and other short-term acts that generally do not have second- and third-order consequences.¹²¹ While guerrilla and terrorist operations share several similarities, guerrilla tactics generally mean a larger group of armed individuals “who operate as a military unit, attack enemy military forces, and seize and hold territory, while also exercising some form of sovereignty or control over a defined geographical areas and its population” (even if only temporarily).¹²² In contrast to crime and guerrilla operations, terrorism is designed to have second- and third-order consequences, not the least of which is a dramatic psychological impact on a mass audience beyond the immediate target. For our purposes, terrorism is “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change.”¹²³ As evidenced by the devastation of 11 September 2001, terrorism can reflect the most heinous designs of man.

Warlords

Warlords have emerged from a long hibernation to resume a prominent role in today's conflict zones. They thrive in the hinterlands of terminally ill states and beyond the control of civil society. The private armies they wield are predators, surviving through plunder, corruption, and crime. Warlords are a significant and often underestimated actor in the international system. They are VNSAs without redeeming social value, championing nothing beyond the accumulation of localized power and wealth for their own group. Warlords are certain to emerge where the roots of violence run deep, such as in Tajikistan, and the transformational engines are strong.

In our opening section we drew attention to Colonel Khudoiberidzev, the warlord who briefly seized the Tajik town of Khojand in 1998. The Colonel is indicative of most warlords, which are defined as leaders of armed groups that control territory locally, and at the same time act “financially and politically in the international system without interference by state(s) in which he is based.”¹²⁴ Warlords and their private armies are mature gangs with memberships ranging from a hundred to several thousand. They are also distinct from insurgents. Where the insurgent draws support from the local population, the warlord preys on the population. Although the warlord recruits from the community, he does not ultimately depend on its popular support for any political end game.¹²⁵

Charming Thugs: The warlord combines charisma with cunning opportunism—the consummate identity entrepreneur. Through membership in his private army, he is able to offer a sense of belonging. He is able to exploit existing identity cleavages, most

often capitalizing on socio-economic disparities along ethnic and/or regional lines. The warlord almost always has some form of professional military or at least extensive paramilitary experience. Most importantly, he has access to resources.

Colonel Khudoiberdiyev, for example, built his army along loose kinship lines. During 1991 and 1992, the Captain Khudoiberdiyev was in charge of recruiting soldiers for the Soviet army from his base in the town of Qurghonteppa in southern Tajikistan. From this position of influence, he was able to offer highly coveted officer positions for a price and to other Lakai tribal members. For elite seeking to avoid conscription, this entrepreneurial warlord readily accepted bribes for exemptions.¹²⁶ By the end of Tajikistan's first civil war in late 1996, Khudoiberdiyev's First Brigade of the Presidential Guard was one of the most effective combat units in the Tajik army due in part to its illegal activities. Dissatisfied with their compensation, the First Brigade picked a fight with Tajik 11th Brigade for control of the central market in Qurghonteppa. Although the 11th Brigade was whipped in a short street-to-street fight, Khudoiberdiyev's newly named Rapid Reaction Force was not satisfied. They rebelled in January-February 1996, moving on the capital Dushanbe.¹²⁷ Another unit of the Presidential Guard was up to the fight. Backed by street thugs armed by the government with AK-47s during a rally at the soccer stadium, the Presidential Guard sent Khudoiberdiyev and his irregulars fleeing into Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks share a loose kinship with the Lakais, and thus, Khudoiberdiyev has used Uzbek territory to launch operations.

Warlordism: Warlords with private armies tend to exhibit several traits. Like the army of Colonel Khudoiberdiyev, they tend

to be highly fluid, moving in and out of government as a function of shifting alliances, power struggles, and most importantly, greed. Participation in government is not likely to result from government spending on equipment, salaries, training, etc. Rather, warlords pursue tactical alliances based on control over some type of economic activity that will generate revenue. In the most lucrative of situations, warlords are given control over casinos, drug routes, or industries. This type of activity is not only common in Tajikistan. Commanders of Turkmen military branches are reportedly charged with building hotels to generate their own revenues. When government cooptation is not sufficiently profitable, warlords turn to overt criminal behaviors like plundering. As an organized and relatively capable military unit, local policy, or civilians are not likely to offer much resistance.

Additional characteristics of private armies ensure their elusiveness as a potential adversary. They rarely wear uniforms or display rank, making it difficult to distinguish them from civilians. Their size is not standardized, rendering any self-imposed unit designation useless as a means of assessing their personnel and equipment numbers. This ambiguity extends to the rank structure. Non-commissioned officers are an extreme rarity. Rather, there is usually a single officer over an indistinguishable band of irregulars. The officers are often chosen based on clan structures rather than merit. Among the Tajik forces that comprise part of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, one unit of approximately 300 men is led by a 15-year-old boy—the youngest commander in the Afghan civil war. Mohammed Aqa Humayun Khadim took command of his unit upon the death of his father, an ethnic Uzbek chieftain of Bolak Kushlaq. Rising every morning at 0500 to pray,

Humayun issues orders to soldiers well beyond him in age and experience. As the soldiers move out to man the six tanks and truck-mounted BM-21 rocket launcher under his command, Humayun is quoted as saying, “they were my father's soldiers and now they belong to me.”¹²⁸

Tactically, the First Brigade demonstrated greater combat capabilities than most private armies—yet, even it was defeated by a rag-tag Tajik army. Based on research conducted by John Mackinlay in sub-Saharan Africa, most of these VNSAs do not have the attitude, structure, or effectiveness of professional military units.¹²⁹ Instead, they are “organized around the magnetism of their leaders” and rely on “their frightening behavior and appearance.”¹³⁰ They rely on conspiracy violence to prey on communities, collecting taxes by generating fears for lost limbs, slain family members or destroyed property. The ultimate asymmetric warrior, these private armies rarely engage government forces or other warlords in open battle, although the most successful private armies are “capable of absorbing defeat in one district and executing revenge at another venue.”¹³¹ Warlords rely principally on violent crime, guerrilla operations, and even terrorism to secure their power.

Alive and Killing: Warlordism continues to reign in Tajikistan despite the peace accords that brought the United Tajikistan Opposition (UTO) into government. As recently as June 2001, the Tajik Ministry of Interior initiated an operation to wipe out private armies in Eastern Tajikistan. The specific target was Rakhmon Sanginov; known locally as the Rakhmon Hitler. After the civil war, Rakhmon promised to retire to a farmer's life. Apparently, milking cows did not suit him. Rakhmon is accused of kidnapping five

police officer and two Interior Ministry servicemen, and possibly being associated with the 11 April 2001 assassination of the Deputy Minister of Interior.¹³² In actuality, the Minister could have been the target of several VNSA operating in Eastern Tajikistan, including splinter groups from the Ministry of Emergency Situations or the Movement for the Islamic Revival of Tajikistan (MIRT).¹³³ Despite the efforts of the Council for National Reconciliation (CNR), warlords are organized and violently active in Tajikistan. Significantly, their range of movement includes the Ferghana Valley and Northern Afghanistan, where they often joined in fighting against the Taliban. One should not be deluded into thinking that warlords are not present elsewhere in the region—they exist! For now, they remain co-opted by the government. Deepening roots of violence and stronger transformational engines, however, will likely cause Yomud warlords in Turkmenistan, *orda* warlords in Kazakhstan, or city-state warlords in Khiva, Uzbekistan, to break with the government.

Transnational Criminal Organizations

The VNSAs of Central Asia are with few exceptions involved in some form of organized crime. It is not surprising that territory controlled by the IMU includes primary drug routes. Kyrgyz and Uzbek officials assert that the IMU controls 70% of the regional drug trade as a part of the Osama bin Laden network.¹³⁴ Like warlords, crime bosses and drug kingpins seek autonomy of action from the state and pursue goals with no social benefit. They exploit the roots of violence and failures in governance to develop membership and perpetuate illegal activities. Conspiracy violence is used for protecting and expanding their networks. Even though many warlords engage in organized crime, and crime bosses employ

private armies, there are important organizational and tactical differences. Distinctions are a consequence of globalization and the transnational character of organized crime. Along the Silk Route, TCOs are gaining ground at the expense of, or sometimes in cooperation with, the state. Their product line is also expanding, including such diverse commodities as drugs, oil, caviar, weapons, humans, and quite possibly, bio-toxins.

Corporate Cunning: TCOs are transnational groups with a corporate structure whose “primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities, often surviving on fear and corruption.”¹³⁵ Like MNCs, TCOs operate in several states simultaneously. Unlike MNCs, they do so illegally. In this regard, Phil Williams suggests they are “transnational organizations par excellence” since they

operate outside the existing structures of authority and power in world politics and have developed sophisticated strategies for circumventing law enforcement in individual states and in the global community of states.¹³⁶

The dark dynamics of globalization are contributing to the rapid proliferations of TCOs. According to the UNESCO, the Kazakh Security Committee recently identified over 125 organized crime groups in Central Asia.¹³⁷ Thirty of these groups, and possibly another 90+ identified by Kyrgyzstan, are directly tied to the drug trade. The IMU, warlords of Tajikistan, clans in Turkmenistan, and families in southern Kyrgyzstan are key players. The rise of transnational economic activity has made it significantly easier to disguise illicit sales, launder money, transfer product, and communicate with strategic allies.¹³⁸ This dynamic has also resulted in the emergence of several global commodities—the most destructive and lucrative of which are narcotics.

Criminal groups do start out as TCOs, but develop into sophisticated transnational players. The evolutionary process can be understood in three phases. In the first, predatory stage, localized gangs use violence to control turf.¹³⁹ These gangs gain recognition from other power brokers, including legitimate authorities as well as influential VNSAs. For example, gangs in the Batken oblast of southern Kyrgyzstan probably controlled localized heroin distribution networks, drawing the attention of more dominate actors like the IMU or possibly, corrupt Uzbek and Kyrgyz governmental security forces. A parasitical relationship develops in which the more powerful state and VNSAs manipulate the gangs to their own purposes. Over time, a symbiotic relationship forms with “the host itself dependent on the parasite” for sustainment.¹⁴⁰ In the Osh and Batken oblasts as well as tribal areas of Turkmenistan, major Russian and Afghan narco-traffickers need local markets to not only move product across frontiers, but to develop local clientele.

Successful TCOs take advantage of their environment, applying their adaptive and innovative organizational networks to a relationship with the global marketplace. Essentially, TCOs link regions where failures in governance can be effectively exploited with regions where income levels can sustain consumption.¹⁴¹ Failures in governance create political and economic space for the development of shadow political and economic sub-systems.¹⁴² Importantly, TCOs have a stake in the perpetuation and expansion of this space. A fluid, networked organizational structure allows the TCO to respond quickly to local conditions while avoiding any concentration of resources or capability. The distributed quality of

TCO networks makes them particularly difficult to assess, monitor, and attack.

The TCO is also distinguished from localized warlords and eco-warriors by its use of strategic alliances with other criminals as a means of increasing profit and reducing risk.¹⁴³ There is little doubt that narco-traffickers in Central Asia are tied in to the Russian mafia and the Chinese Triads. Others point to the role of Iranian drug lords, such as Hajj Bhulam Baloch; however, the Iranian government has essentially shutdown this route. Of note, Iran is responsible for more than 80% of the global seizures of opium due to an extensive interdiction effort that involves concrete dam barriers, observations posts, 30,000 law enforcement personnel, and the death penalty for narcotics possession.¹⁴⁴

Like warlords, crime bosses and drug lords capitalize on the roots of violence for recruitment. While not necessarily charismatic leaders, they do offer membership in a group that is often defined along family, clan, or ethnic lines. Most importantly, they offer steady income. The IMU reportedly offers new militants up to \$100 a day. Commanders can receive up to \$500!¹⁴⁵ When compared to \$1-3 per day for most rural people, the risk of being arrested is worth taking. Even though traffickers get 90% of the “value-added” for heroin in a producer country, farmers still get a 6% cut, processors 2%, and traders 2%.¹⁴⁶ Bottom line—crime pays very well. In terms of specific membership, reports indicate 65.3% of the region’s drug traffickers are Tajik citizens, 10.8% are Russian citizens, 9.2% are Kyrgyz citizens, and 8.2% are Turkmen citizens.¹⁴⁷ Looking behind the numbers, it is interesting to note the growing role of women in narco-trafficking. Based on drug arrests, women in Kazakhstan have increased their participation from

approximately 3% in 1996 to 12.2%.¹⁴⁸ This figure is up to 35% for Tajikistan.¹⁴⁹ According to Olcott and Udalova, women accept less pay, are more protective of their sources, and generally receive more lenient sentences.¹⁵⁰

Criminal Aggression: TCOs are the masters of conspiracy violence, applying lethal force in a highly organized, selective and compartmented manner. Although we chose not to interview drug lords, there is widespread street knowledge of the murders, kidnappings, and gunfights associated with organized crime. There has been a string of high-profile kidnappings in the so-called “Osh Knot” of the Ferghana Valley, including Japanese and American tourists. When one combines criminal intent with the political and religious motivations of hybrid VNSAs like the IMU, collective violence can take the form of terrorism and guerrilla attacks. Proficiency in the use of violence is enhanced by the prominent role of experienced fighters from the wars in Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Drawing again on the pioneering work of Phil Williams, there are three general types of violence associated with TCOs. Although he focuses on narco-trafficking, our research suggests equally valid application to networks associated with other illegal commodities. First, there is violence to protect profits and turf.¹⁵¹ Rarely is this violence between criminal groups. Indeed, Professor Anara Tabyshalieva of the Institute for Regional Studies in Kyrgyzstan describes the drug mafia as a “model of inter-ethnic cooperation.”¹⁵² Rather, violence is with government security forces. IMU raids into the Ferghana Valley of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 are regarded by many experts to have been primarily for the purpose of protecting drug routes. This type of conflict has also been limited through cooptation of border guards. It is widely

accepted that the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division along the Tajikistan border and other Russian border troops are in on the trade. Among the more damaging reports are accusations that Russian military aircraft are used to move drugs from Tajikistan to airports outside Moscow.¹⁵³

The additional two types of violence involve drug addicts committing crimes to support their habit and users perpetrating violence while under the influence of mind-altering substances.¹⁵⁴ There is strong evidence that drug-related crimes are climbing steadily upward, catching the West and Russia.¹⁵⁵ As isolated behaviors, these acts of violence do not contribute to our understanding of VNSAs; however, we consider growing drug use by VNSA members to be both likely and dangerous. Even with religious prohibitions, addiction is on the rise, especially among the dispossessed youth that are ripened by the roots of violence.¹⁵⁶ For relief organizations and military operators alike, countering the threats posed by civilian-clothed, networked irregulars that are simultaneously high will be a significant challenge. We must be prepared to engage thugs on drugs.

Militant Religious Movements

The call to prayer resonates throughout the bazaar in Andijan, a leafy provincial capital in the Ferghana Valley. A diverse array of men stream through the market stalls and pile out of Daewoo minivans. Some wear heavy beards and flowing robes while others are clean-shaven and sport western attire. The former take greater risks since the Uzbekistan security services are known to monitor this mosque and keep records of men that “appear” to have connections to militant religious movements like the IMU. The main Friday mosque, or Juma Mosque, quickly overflows, leaving many to

unroll their prayer rugs on the surrounding streets. The strong showing is not surprising given the Ferghana Valley's reputation as a center of Islamist activity. Compared to other Friday mosques we have visited along the Silk Route, Ferghana mosques are certainly the busiest, but we also notice the even larger crowds in the market that are seemingly oblivious to the rhythmic call to prayer.

Militant religious movements have received increasing global attention as a result of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. This attention has zeroed in on Central Asia where the phenomenon is far from new. Although many faiths are present in the region, nearly all past and present religious VNSAs have claimed some connection to Islam. Contrary to the expectations of many western alarmists in the early 1990s, the region has not witnessed a widespread militant Islamist resurgence. Rather, only a few militant Islamist movements are organized, active, and willing to use collective violence to achieve their objectives. Limited numbers; however, have not prevented these VNSAs from exploiting a growing at-risk population, and capitalizing on external support from other militant movements like the Taliban and Osama bin Laden's Al Queda network. Moreover, there is mounting concern that state coercion as well as overt cooperation with the hated west is having a blowback effect.

Islamic Nationalism: Religious VNSAs must be distinguished from non-violent, politically active religious movements. In addition to avoiding misguided generalizations, these groups warrant our consideration because the potential exists for currently peaceful movements to resort to violence in response to excessive state coercion or other failures in governance. Political religious movements in the region are entirely Islamic. Current Islamic

nationalists have their roots in the Soviet era when unregistered mullahs led underground communities of believers (known as the *umma*). Great risks were taken to operate illegal mosques, open religious schools (*madrasehs*), and perform life-cycle rituals.¹⁵⁷ Their activities tended to revolve around holy places, which provided a forum for the religious leaders, or *mullahs*, to address the *umma* outside of “official” mosques controlled by the Soviet state. By some estimates, there were over 1,800 clandestine mosques in 1987 as compared to 365 official ones.¹⁵⁸

Independence brought an overt attempt by the clandestine Muslim community to integrate Islam with the emerging political system. For these emergent groups, Islam is an all-encompassing faith that cannot be divorced from the political, social, and economic life of the state. Among the several Islamic republican parties that emerged, the most organized and active is the Islamic Revival (or Renaissance) Party (IRP), which ultimately fractured in to state-specific parties throughout Central Asia and the Caucasus. The general goals of the IRP include:

- Explain to the people the real meaning of the holy Koran and *hadith* (traditions of the prophet) and call the people to live and act according to the Koran and *hadith*.
- Fight national and racial discrimination, impudence, crime, alcoholism, and all other things forbidden by Islamic law (*shari'a*) through understanding and appeal.
- Educate young people in the principles of Islam and create instruction and training centers and *madrasehs* for this purpose.
- Ensure the rights of all Muslims are exercised according to the Koran.
- Strengthen Islamic brotherhood, develop religious relations with the Muslim world, and

seek a relationship of equal rights with representatives of other religions.

- Cooperate with other democratic parties and state organizations in all fields.

- Create philanthropic funds that will support anyone in need of help.

- Strengthen the family according to the principles of Islam and ensure the rights of women and children.

- Ensure the principles of Islamic economy and regain economic purity.

- Solve the problems of the people according to the holy Koran and *hadith*.¹⁵⁹

Notably, these goals do not call for the establishment of an Islamic state. That said, achieving these objectives is only feasible in the context of an Islamic republic. The IRP also avoids calls for immediate violent action.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the Uzbek IRP works out of its Ferghana Valley strongholds, like Andijan, to train new clerics and renew adherence to Islam among the population. As articulated by Imam Abdul Ahmad in Namagan, “first Ferghana, then Uzbekistan and then the whole Central Asia will become an Islamic state.”¹⁶¹

The IRP and other Islamic nationalist parties face significant obstacles to their long-term goals. Most importantly, the authoritarian regimes of the region have banned all Islamic political parties, resulting in thousands of Uzbeks crossing the border to the Kyrgyz side of the Ferghana Valley. The lone exception is Tajikistan where the IRP holds a role in government as a result of the peace accords. Second, government security services actively monitor suspected Islamists, accusing IRP members of being terrorists. Whether the label is warranted is a matter of some controversy. It is widely known that law enforcement officials consider a beard to be a sign of Islamic opposition, sufficiently

telling of one's political views to warrant listing, harassment, and even arrest. According to several estimates, hundreds of activists have been jailed, and at least six have disappeared.¹⁶² The first to go was Abdullo Utaev, the leader of the IRP in Uzbekistan. He was abducted in 1992 during the first year of independence and remains missing.¹⁶³

In addition to state coercion, the IRP faces challenges from militant groups who accuse IRP leaders of cooperating with the government and of being co-opted by the official, state-controlled Islamic institutions. A fourth obstacle is the general political passivity of the region's Muslims, which is reinforced by a personal faith tradition. Finally, new strategic alliances between the US and Central Asia Republics in the fight against terrorism do not suggest that the US will be applying pressure for political liberalization any time soon. Given these trends and the persistent sources of tension outlined previously, we expect there to be increasing defections and fissures with the Islamic nationalist movement.

Militant Islam: Islamic VNSAs benefit from the continued failings of the moderate Islamic nationalists. They too have their contemporary roots in the Soviet period. The Basmachis, for example, resisted the early years of Soviet rule in the 1920s and 1930s. With some 20,000 fighters spread across the region, local mullahs led guerilla operations against an ultimately more powerful Soviet Red Army. Today's militant Islamists share characteristics with extreme militant religious movements around the world.¹⁶⁴ Richard Shultz and William Olson summarize these characteristics in their 1994 work, *Ethnic and Religious Conflict: Emerging Threat to US Security*:

- Militant religious political movements tend to view existing government authority as corrupt and

illegitimate because they do not uphold religious values.

- They attack the inability of government to address the roots of violence.
- They are universalists, seeing their views as part of an inheritance for all believers, which orient them toward transstate activities and disregard for national boundaries.
- They are exclusionists, relegating all conflicting opinions to the margins or excluding them all together.
- They are willing to use coercion to achieve their true ends—compromise is unacceptable.¹⁶⁵

In Central Asia, these qualities are primarily associated with a “purist” religious movement known locally as Wahabism.¹⁶⁶ Originating in the harsh deserts of Najd, Saudi Arabia, Wahabism arrived in Central Asia around 1912 by way of India and Afghanistan. Espousing a strict, puritanical version of Islam, Wahabis are unwilling to entertain the theologies of the other four main Sunni schools of thought: Hanafi (the school of most Central Asian Muslims), Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali.¹⁶⁷ The Wahabi movement does have a doctrinal connection with the Hanbali School, which also emphasizes the Koran and *hadith* as the definitive sources of Islamic law. Such a rigorous interpretation leaves little room for cooperation with the state, official Islamic institutions, or other faiths. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to declare that there is an evangelical war being waged between Christian missionaries and Wahabi mullahs on the streets of Bishkek.

Wahabi intolerance is compounded by a *jihad* culture that embraces a strict interpretation of the so-called verse of the sword, which translates "when the forbidden months are past, then fight

and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them" (IX, 5).¹⁶⁸ Wahabis believe this verse commands Muslims to attack disbelief until it is eradicated from the earth.¹⁶⁹ Placed in context, as proffered by the Islamic scholar, Mohammad Ali, the verse takes on a different meaning. Indeed, one finds that it is directed against those that initiate an attack on Muslims, and the idolatrous tribes that broke treaties with Muslims (IX: 13, VIII: 56).¹⁷⁰ A broader interpretation, based on Shaybani's *The Islamic Law of Nations*, suggests *jihad* to be a struggle both to improve and expand Islam, but not necessarily through violent means.¹⁷¹ The Wahabi reject these more "liberal interpretations." The Wahabis are ready to fight to see the Islamic Caliphate restored on earth. As articulated by a leading Wahabi *mullah*, "the IRP wants to be in parliament. We have not desire to be in parliament. We want a revolution."¹⁷² Wahabis are also willing to die for their cause. Indeed, one the first martyrs of Islam in the modern era was Bahauddin Vaissov, a Wahabi teacher in Ferghana who was imprisoned in 1950 where he later died.¹⁷³

The movement spreads at the grass roots level, fueled by charismatic leadership and external support. *Mullah* Abdul Kehi and Abdulwali Qari are especially well known for their persuasive sermons in footholds throughout the Ferghana Valley, particularly in Namangan and Ferghana, Uzbekistan, and Osh and Jalalabad, Kyrgyzstan. But fiery rhetoric is rarely sufficient. The Wahabi provide social services the state fails to deliver. They build schools and mosques. In Namangan, a multi-story Islamic education complex was built in the mid-1990s, rumored to have cost over \$127,000. Islamic centers have also been built in Osh, Jalalabad, Andijan, and Margilan.¹⁷⁴ Rather than bribing for books and marks,

students are given books, literature for their parents, and free lunches. In return, they proselytize with the *mullahs* in local villages on the weekend, and when older, they might join a VNSA.¹⁷⁵

External support is key to the Wahabi success. The Saudi Arabian Wahabi movement, known as *Ahl e-Sunnah*, is the principal benefactor. Within two years of independence, *Ahl e-Sunnah* had set up offices in Margilan, and funneled over \$1.3 million of Saudi money in to new construction and social services. The flow has not subsided. Other important benefactors have been the Taliban, Osama bin Laden, and the *Jamaat-i-Islami* out of Pakistan. In the face of government crackdowns on mosques and schools, prospective students often travel to Afghanistan and Pakistan for education. They have been sponsored by the Taliban, with bin Laden backing, and ultimately recruited for their *jihad* against corrupt Arab regimes and the West.

The IMU, also known as the *Harakatul Islamiyyah*, is the most organized and violently active of the Wahabi groups. It earned worldwide notoriety and a fourth place ranking on the State Departments Foreign Terrorist Organizations List in September 2000 after the kidnapping of four US mountain climbers. The IMU's political leader is Takhir Yuldash and its military commander is Juma Namangani. Namangani brings a warlord's character to the movement. His military background includes service as a Soviet paratrooper in Afghanistan and commander of approximately of 1,000 irregulars during the Tajik civil war. With the end of the war, he capitalized on the thousands of now unemployed former fighters and the resource backing of the Wahabi movement to expand IMU operations.

Recruiting is heaviest in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan. The region is desperately poor and packed with mercenaries, ready to accept the regular wages that come with joining the *jihad*. Islam is certainly not the motivating factor in their service. Among IMU members are also Tajiks, Uzbeks, Chechens, Uighars, and Afghans, many of whom are seasoned veterans from the civil wars in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The link to Afghanistan remains strong. Namangani and his fighters receive sanctuary and training at Afghan camps. Although discussed here as a militant religious movement, the IMU is also assessed as participating in narcotics and weapons trafficking.

Tactically, the IMU embraces the full range of collective violence. In addition to the high profile kidnapping in 2000, the IMU raised \$3 million off the kidnapping of four Japanese geologists in 1999 and \$50,000 for three Kyrgyz district officials. Assassinations and bombings are also on the menu. The Uzbek government holds the IMU responsible for a series of Tashkent bombings in 1997, which missed their target, Islam Karimov, but left 16 dead and 128 wounded.¹⁷⁶ Additional assassination attempts on Karimov as well as bombings in 1997 and 1999 resulted in a government crackdown that continues today.

Namangani also commands guerrilla and conventional forces, which have conducted a series of cross-border raids from Tajikistan in recent years. In 1999, approximately 800 IMU guerrillas launched an unsuccessful attack near Batken with the intent of establishing a permanent base from which to launch assaults on Uzbekistan.¹⁷⁷ A smaller force of approximately 100 guerrillas tried again in August 2000, attacking Kyrgyz security forces and seizing several villages in Uzbekistan (27 soldiers killed). The latter

become the subject of the popular video showing an Uzbek soldier battling for his freedom from an IMU camp. A third round of attacks was expected in 2001, particularly when Yuldash announced during a BBC interview on 3 Aug that several thousand IMU fighters had established a base in Batken.¹⁷⁸ Yuldash certainly exaggerates, and no attack has materialized. IMU fighters have probably retreated to their training base in Afghanistan, which is just a few miles from the Uzbek border.¹⁷⁹ Given the IMUs dependence on the Taliban regime, the US victory is likely to set back future small-unit operations.

Raging Religion? Militant religious movements in Central Asia are isolated geographically and without widespread support across the region. Nationalist Islam is more dominant on the political landscape, but is also constrained by institutional and cultural obstacles to generating enthusiasm for its agenda. That said, Islamic VNSAs do have a solid foothold in the Ferghana Valley and are able to move with relative ease across the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Persistent socio-economic deprivation, resource scarcity, and demographic pressures are certain to expand the recruiting pool. State coercion, charismatic identity entrepreneurs, and resource access are strong transformational engines. There is also emerging anecdotal evidence that US counter-terrorism operations are creating a popular backlash, fueling the Wahabi *jihad*. The defeat of the Taliban regime and eradication of the Al Queda network, however, are likely to deal a significant blow to the IMU in particular, which is heavily dependent on these relationships for financial backing, training and safe haven. Even with such a defeat, Islamic VNSAs are expected

to persevere; although we assess it as highly unlikely they will ever witness the new Caliphate.

Ethno-Political Groups

The ethnic component of warlords, TCOs, and religious movements is important, but not the defining characteristic. Therefore, we must consider the potential rise of violent ethno-political groups pursuing ethnic-based agendas. Five major ethnic identity cleavages exist in Central Asia, all of which create at least some tension with the notion of citizenship. This incongruence between the borders of the republics and the perceived dimensions of the ethnic homelands can produce territorial conflicts, especially when they are exacerbated by economic, demographic, and ecological stress.

Ethno-political groups transform into VNSAs relatively slowly and only with other supporting inputs. The more reinforcing identity cleavages that exist, coupled with reduced efficacy of the state, the higher the probability such actors will emerge. A continuum of ethno-political VNSAs may follow during their incubation period as follows: (1) become ethnically aware, (2) become ethnically organized, (3) develop goals which primarily or exclusively help one's own ethnic organization, and (4) using violent means to achieve ethnically-based goals.

By ethnically aware, we assert that individuals are conscious of their ethnic identity—they are keenly aware of ethnic differences. Most Central Asian peoples were not ethnically aware prior to Russian colonization. Soviet disintegration, coupled with nation-building programs by the five Central Asian Republics at independence, ensure nearly all peoples are now aware of their ethnicity. Ethnic organization is a significant step toward

mobilization for two main reasons. First, creating organization requires a motivated (charismatic) individual or group of individuals to lay the groundwork for the organization—not a small task. Second, an individual joining an organization is making the leap from acting in self-interest to acting in the interest of a group.

Ethnic organization in Central Asia is definitely surging. To begin, the number of political parties, non-governmental groups and informal (and often illegal) groups based on ethnic lines is large and growing. Indeed, the number of NGOs registered with the Ministry of Justice in Kyrgyzstan stood at 3,000 at the end of 2000; while the majority of these NGOs work in the social sector (largely addressing poverty, unemployment, women's issues, etc.) a significant number work ethnic issues. It is important to note that some of these NGOs exist in an effort to improve inter-ethnic relations, not simply to advance the cause of a single ethnic group.¹⁸⁰ Paradoxically, all five Central Asian Republics recently cracked down on almost all political actors (the press, political parties, and NGOs); thus, the likelihood of such ethno-political actors going underground (and thus defining the state as an enemy rather than a political framework which facilitates their development) is growing as well.¹⁸¹ Actions likely to encourage the creation of additional ethnic organizations include nationalizing policies, perceived favoritism of certain ethnic groups or clans, or economic disparities along ethnic divides. In a rather humorous book on security issues, President Islam Karimov repeatedly makes the (inaccurate) boastful claim that all ethnic minority rights are respected in Uzbekistan. Indeed, Karimov continues, “consolidation processes based on ethno-cultural grounds are actively underway among other nationalities that live on the

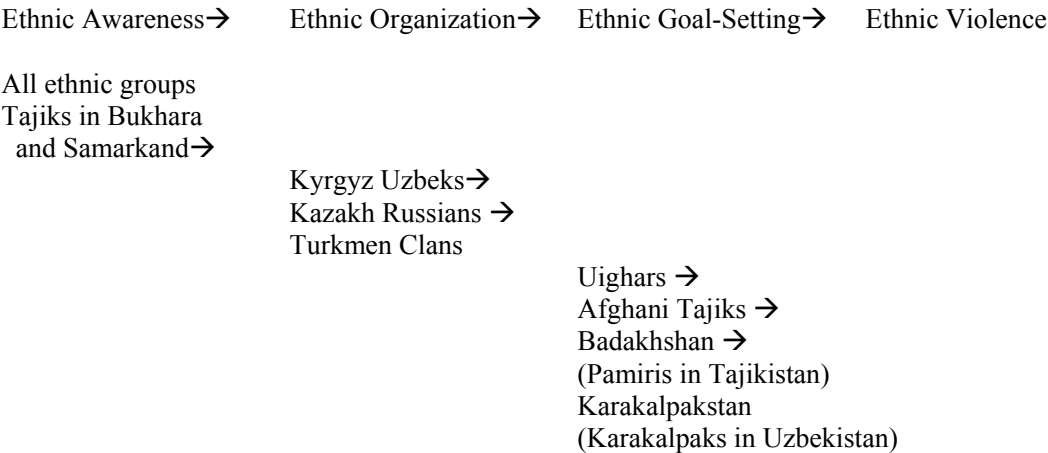
territory of Uzbekistan.”¹⁸² What President Karimov does not understand is that “ethnic consolidation” is simply sowing the seeds for future ethnic mobilization.

Some ethnic organizations have reached the third stage on the continuum—defining their goals exclusively for their own ethnic group, even if it comes at the expense of other organizations. A handful of groups are at the extreme end of the spectrum, using violence to accomplish their goals. While some of these groups form in an ad hoc manner (such as Uzbek farmers in Osh resorting to violence over perceived favoritism for their Kyrgyz peers), others exist for the primary purpose of advocating violence to pursue ethnic goals.

The most important fact resulting from an application of this model to Central Asia is that only a paltry handful of ethnic organizations are moving down the spectrum. The vast majority of ethnic groups are gaining momentum in their upward march towards ethnic-goal setting and violence. The primary reason Turkmen Clans are not moving up the spectrum is President Niyazov’s exceptionally heavy-handed tactics in repressing any political or organizational expression other than adoration for his own regime. This stalled movement is temporary—once the aging and unhealthy Niyazov passes on, such clan-based identity will likely come back with a vengeance, especially if the lesser clans believe that the dominant Tekke clan was unfairly privileged or were repressive to other clans under Turkmenbashi’s rule.

Central Asia provides plenty of grist for ethno-political VNSA incubation. We selected two prominent examples that highlight the process by which a group climbs the ethnic motivation spectrum,

Figure 6: Application of the Ethnic Motivation Spectrum to Central Asia



and moves to the cusp of becoming a VNSA—Uighars and Karakalpaks.

Uigharstan—Worth Fighting For: The recent history of the Uighar (and the Uighar Diaspora in Central Asia) begins with China's absorption of Eastern Turkestan (a infant state created during World War II) in the late 1940s. Fleeing the communist government, tens of thousands of Turkic-speaking Uighars fled west from China, which had expanded the Xinjiang province to include Eastern Turkestan. As a result, every Central Asian Republic, in addition to India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, has a noteworthy Uighar population; Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have a significant Uighar presence.¹⁸³ The resulting diasporas kept their ethnic and cultural identity during Soviet times. With the collapse of the Soviet Union came the concurrent irredentist desire to regain a Uighar homeland. China quickly established diplomatic ties with the Central Asian Republics, however, leaving the Uighar nation divided by the complicated and (still) unsettled borders of the region.

The Uighars, much like their Muslim brothers to the west, identified themselves along religious lines prior to the Chinese arrival. Just as Russian colonization introduced national identity to many of the Central Asian peoples, Chinese occupation and subjugation made the Uighars ethnically aware as well. Thus, for the Uighars, the first step toward becoming a VNSA was taken nearly 50 years ago. Under strict communist rule by both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, organization for the Uighar community was difficult. However, soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, several Uighar-based organizations sprang forth, reflecting the desire of at least a portion of the Uighar

population to have their own country. The Chinese partially placated this desire for independence by establishing the Xinjiang Uighar Autonomous Region (XUAR).¹⁸⁴ Thus, the next two steps up the ethnic motivation spectrum can reasonably be estimated as the early 1990s.

As is the case with nearly all ethno-political actors, the decision to turn to violence is not ethnically or identity-based alone. Other inputs, to include resource scarcity, demographics, underdevelopment, and coercion all come into the Uighar calculus. Indeed, under the appropriate leadership and political structure, allowing an ethnic group to organize and pursue ethnic goals—within the confines of the state—can serve to placate that group. Given oppressive leadership, concurrent with resource scarcity, underdevelopment, etc., allowing an ethnic organization to move up the spectrum in such a manner only empowers that group to pursue violence once the state framework serves as a frustration rather than a augmenting structure. It is with this bifurcation in mind that we proceed with the Uighar example.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin announced his “Go West” policy in 1996, largely to develop the desolate western portions of China. As a result, tens of millions of ethnically Han Chinese are expected to move to XUAR in the next two decades. This massive demographic shift has created significant resentment with the Uighar population; the Chinese are quickly changing the cultural trappings of the area (not the least of which is consuming massive amounts of pork—an insult to that Muslim population).¹⁸⁵ Although Uighar separatists have waged a campaign of sporadic violence since the late 1980s (which is, ironically, when a great deal of inter-ethnic violence in the rest of Central Asia erupted), the level

of violence increased with the increasing number of Chinese.¹⁸⁶ This violence has included planting bombs, killing Chinese police and soldiers, robbing banks, etc. Furthermore, anti-Chinese rioting in the region's capital of Urumqi, Kashgar, and Yining left some Chinese dead.¹⁸⁷ Following one particular 1997 riot in Yining that left at least 10 dead, and a bomb attack in Beijing the same year, China cracked down on the Uighars and began passing a series of bilateral understandings with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in an attempt to get those governments to do the same.¹⁸⁸ More recently in early 2001, Uighar separatists conducted yet another bombing campaign. The response from the Chinese government was swift and harsh—in the resulting wave of arrests, called Operation Strike Hard, over 200 Uighars were sentenced to death and many more were handed lengthy prison sentences.¹⁸⁹

How the violent relationship between the Uighars in XUAR and the Chinese government affects Uighar mobilization in Central Asia is clear—the structural coercion extends to those governments as well. Uighar separatists and Kazakh authorities in Almaty waged a tit-for-tat battle in September of 2000.¹⁹⁰ Kyrgyz authorities branded the Uighars as Muslim extremists and actively tried to link them to the Khizb-ut-Takhrir, an active Islamic organization. Further, most avenues of Uighar protests against any government, including the Chinese and Kyrgyz, are closed.¹⁹¹ Thus, the state is now viewed as an obstacle toward Uighar expression rather than an empowering avenue—a promise for continued, perhaps increased violence.

As a result, several Uighar organizations exist in the Central Asian Republics, some of them devoted to the violent creation of a Uigharstan. These groups include, but are not limited to, the Uighar

Ozatlik Tashlakhty (bases in Kazakhstan, fighting for an independent Uighar enclave in Xinjiang), the United National Revolutionary Front of Turkestan, the Organization for the Liberation of Uigharstan, and the International Committee for the Liberation of Turkestan and Yana Ayat. Although the focus of these groups' violence is primarily China, this past year illustrates that Central Asian governments are considered legitimate targets for attempting to interfere with the groups' efforts.

Some Central Asian authorities believe any independent homeland for the Uighars will negatively affect them as well. According to a representative of the Kazakhstan Foreign Ministry, "It should be remembered that the aim of the Uighur separatists is to create an independent Uighur state, not only on the territory of Sintszyan-Ugursk [Xinjiang] but also in parts of Kazakhstan."¹⁹² At this point, the political boundaries between China and Central Asia become pointless for all sides—Uighar separatists attack both Central Asian and Chinese targets, Central Asian regimes fear increased Uighar influence both in their own homelands as well as China, and China convinced the Central Asian states to adopt oppressive measures against their Uighar populations.

The future for the Uighars and the Uighar movement is cloudy. While the majority of Uighars are not violent, both Central Asian and Chinese authorities are fearful of outside Islamic influences radicalizing the Uighar population. For example, in 1997 the French newspaper *al-Watan al-Arabic* erroneously reported that Osama bin Laden had intentions of moving to Xinjiang to start a jihad against Chinese rule there.¹⁹³ This greatly worried Chinese leaders, who were concerned about conditions in Afghanistan due to the flow of drugs and other illegal goods from there.¹⁹⁴ Given

current military operations in the area, these fears are sure to resurrect. This last point should not be lost. One of the more influential sources of VNSA incubation may be outside actors. With China being a primary example of an outside actor towards the Uighars, the US presence in Central Asia may indeed trigger an effort to mobilize the Uighars against the US and their host governments. While this is speculation, the possibility should be taken seriously.

Karakalpakstan—Primed to Erupt: Karakalpakstan, literally meaning the “land of the black hats,” is an autonomous region at the extreme western end of Uzbekistan, bordering on the Aral Sea and the Amu and Syr Darya Rivers. The Karakalpaks history in the region goes back at least to the 16th Century. Having always been at least autonomous, the Karakalpaks fought against the Mongols, the Khiva and Kazakh Khanates, and later the Russian encroachment. The Karakalpak history becomes complicated after the Soviet Revolution. In 1924, the region was awarded autonomous status under the administration of Kazakhstan. In 1930 it became a part of the Russian Federation and on March 20, 1932, it was reformed as the Karakalpak Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. On December 5, 1932, Karakalpakstan became a part of the Uzbek Republic, a status that remained until the break-up of the Soviet Union. In December 14, 1991 the Karakalpak Republic was announced as an autonomous republic in Uzbekistan.¹⁹⁵ With this status came its own Constitution, parliament, capital, and other structures associated with government. Given this long tradition of independence and some level autonomy under the Soviets, the Karakalpaks have a level of ethnic awareness.

The most striking thing about Karakalpakstan is not its political status, but the wretched conditions in which that region exists. It is home of one of the greatest environmental catastrophes in the world—the dying of Aral Sea. Fishing villages, which fifty years ago rested on the lapping shores of the Aral, now lie over 100 miles away from the poisoned water. Vast dry flats are suggestive of former placid waters—now replaced with barren soil mixed with harsh chemicals and salt, constantly whipped by the wind, sending noxious dust clouds for hundreds of miles. The only place where many of the Aral Sea fish (which once sustained the Karakalpaks) now exist is in the Karakalpak museum in Nukus.

The health catastrophe is as bad as the environmental collapse. Anemia among women is nearly universal. Most Karakalpaks show signs of malnutrition. Children below the age of 15, who make up 40% of the population, show signs of scurvy and liver and kidney problems. Infant mortality in some areas is 50 per 1,000. Birth defects, which match the startling figure, are five times the rate in Europe. The list of depressing statistics could continue, but the point is made—the Karakalpaks are an exceptionally unhealthy population.¹⁹⁶

It is not a leap to suggest the Karakalpak's health woes are linked to the environmental ruin in their homeland. Indeed, a comparative analysis with other population groups in the region with similar dietary and living habits shows that those populations in the Aral Sea region suffer greater health problems than those further away (such as Turkmen or Uzbeks from the eastern half of the country).¹⁹⁷ A temporal analysis, comparing what few statistics on the health of the Karakalpak population earlier this century with that populations' current health, suggests the same thing—this

population began getting sick approximately two decades ago, as the Soviet agricultural practices of the region were beginning take a toll on the environment.

Given the ethnic awareness and organization, the poverty, resource shortages, and other conditions conducive to VNSA incubation, why are the Karakalpaks still peaceful? According to Thomas Szayna, a RAND Corporation expert on Central Asia, the answer contains many dimensions.¹⁹⁸ First, the problems facing the Karakalpaks are similar to the problems facing all Uzbeks—only far more severe. With an extensive drought hammering western Uzbekistan (due to some weather patterns but also largely because the Amu and Syr Darya Rivers are fully exploited before they reach western Uzbekistan) new disparities are likely to emerge. With a shortage of potable water, many are drinking from poor sources of water, creating a surge in infectious diseases. As of 2001, approximately 48,000 are without their main source of income, as crops have withered. No rice was harvested in Karakalpakstan at all in 2000. With up to ninety percent of Karakalpak's agriculture destroyed last year, and a similar percentage facing destruction this year, the Karakalpaks may be at the breaking point.¹⁹⁹

A second reason Karakalpakstan is still reasonably stable is that no charismatic leader has emerged willing to directly challenge Tashkent. Two events could change that. The first is a continuing rise in Karakalpak identity awareness. Although Karakalpak ethnic awareness can be traced back several decades (possibly centuries), it is not exceptionally deep. With less than 40% of Karakalpakstan's population actually being Karakalpak (Uzbeks outnumber the Karakalpaks), a penetrating and uniform ethnic awareness is difficult to accomplish. With more and more Uzbeks

moving east due to the drought and health problems, these population dynamics may change.

The second potential “trigger event” is the Uzbek state being fully occupied with other challenges to its authority, probably taking the form of a surge in IMU activity. Such an event could force the central government to pull the limited resources directed to the Karakalpak region into other areas such as defense. Should that occur, the Karakalpaks may begin adopting a victim mindset, creating a growing list of grievances against the central government. Additionally, the central government may be perceived as too occupied with other challenges than to worry about its far western province. Such a window of opportunity may be what Karakalpak nationalists are waiting for.

The Karakalpak issue must be described as latent, but it should not be dismissed. If some kind of stasis or slight improvement is achieved, the likelihood of the Karakalpaks breeding a VNSA in the near future is unlikely. Should any of several triggering events develop—VNSA uprisings elsewhere, conditions getting comparatively worse, or a charismatic leader emerging—this dormant issue has the foundation to incubate violent groups with the goal of independence from Uzbekistan.

Eco-Warriors

There is no tradition in Central Asia of violent environmental organizations such as the Earth Liberation Front or Earth First! Indeed, although environmental degradation in the region is pervasive and substantial, no concomitant environmental consciousness, such as that compared to western societies, yet exists. A moment that solidified this perception came when the authors handed out sticks of gum to some small Turkmen

children—perhaps 3 years old—on a private bus between Mary and Ashgabat. After unwrapping the gum, without thought or prodding from their parents, the young children tossed the wrappers out the half-open window, as naturally as if it was what they were taught to do from the moment they were cognizant of the concept of disposal.

Having thus caveated the discussion, the possibility of future VNSAs emerging from the environmental turmoil is real. Since independence, environmental awareness is on the rise for a variety of reasons. Educated individuals (particularly university professors) are beginning to speak out on the issue. The large increase in NGOs working in Central Asia has increased both local and world awareness of the catastrophes in the region. With the exception of Turkmenistan, “home-grown” NGOs, many of them based on environmental awareness, have sprung up since 1994. Websites, newsletters, conferences, and grassroots projects all mark the arrival of this new voice of civil society.

Supporting the assessment that an eco-warrior VNSA could emerge is the Nevada-Semey Movement. Founded in 1989 by Olzhas Suleymenov, a Kazakh poet and politician, the Movement’s original goal was to stop nuclear testing at the Polygon, located in northeastern Kazakhstan, and the largest such testing facility in the world. After two particularly massive tests that created huge shock waves and a radioactive plume over much of northern Kazakhstan, Suleymenov organized a grassroots campaign that collected over one million Kazakh signatures demanding an end to the testing. Eight months later, the Kazakhstan Communist Party called for closure of the Polygon, and no additional tests occurred. After Kazakh independence in 1991, the Polygon was permanently closed.²⁰⁰ Such a massive demonstration of discontent with

government policies empirically suggests that Central Asians will take action based on environmental concerns.

This history, coupled with the rapidly expanding awareness of environmental issues, provides grounds for VNSA creation in two ways. First, eco-warriors may actually develop indigenously—albeit for resource scarcity issues, rather than for the aim of simply protecting the environment. For example in 1992 and 1993, due to the severe water shortages, Uzbeks and Turkmen communities near Dashoguz sent raiding parties across the common Amu Darya in order to destroy the other community's pumping stations and canals.²⁰¹ How soon such similar activity will re-occur due to the present drought is unknown. A more troubling question is how long until organized groups, who would not directly benefit from such destructive activity, begin using violence to oppose government or social group activity based on their own singular environmental concerns.

A second incubation route for environmentally-based VNSAs involves external factors such as outside actors, possibly diasporas, attempting to influence events. An example of such a potential VNSA is an organization calling itself Eastern Turkestan. This organization claims that a large swath of western China, roughly encompassing the Xinjiang province and parts of Tibet, were illegally invaded by the Chinese Army, and is now illegally occupied. Its goals include secession from China and creation of an independent Eastern Turkestan. This organization began beating the environmental drum in 1993 in response to Chinese nuclear testing at Lop Nur. Its on-line newsletter reported a large protest at the Chinese embassy in Almaty, Kazakhstan, was in response for support of the victims in Eastern Turkestan.²⁰² Perhaps more

ominously, the World Tibet Network described in detail the ecological disaster and the health impacts on the citizens of Eastern Turkestan due to Chinese testing at Lop Nur. The press release ended with the following suggestive statement: “The peaceful demonstrations of the peoples of Eastern Turkestan living at home *and abroad* demanding the closure of the nuclear testing site have so far achieved no results.” (emphasis added)²⁰³ The point here is that a group with political aspirations may turn to environmental issues to find resonance within its local populace, its Diasporas, and possible sympathetic environmental organizations outside the region.

In a similar vein, it is also possible Western militant environmental and/or anti-globalization groups could infiltrate the region and organize violent attacks or protests against various symbols of environmental abuse. While unlikely, perusing many websites published by these groups results in stories such as the US government secretly developing a killer fungus in state laboratories in Uzbekistan in an attempt to destroy the poppy fields in the region.²⁰⁴ As these groups of protesters have illustrated a remarkable mobility and global presence, it is possible such groups could organize violent activities even in the tightly controlled republics of Central Asia. The US military seems to be taking the potential of emerging eco-warriors/terrorists seriously as well. US Central Command, in cooperation with the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Environmental Change and Security Project, listed environmental security issues to be watched in Central Asia. The emergence of eco-terrorists was one of the seven items listed.²⁰⁵

Closing Shots

Several common threads emerge from our VNSA analysis.

First, membership principally consists of young people drawn from the at-risk population. As the roots of violence become more acute, the ranks of ripe recruits will grow and loyalties will increasingly shift away from the state. And initial recruitment in most VNSA is along clan and tribal lines, which seem to persist over time.

Second, collective violence is most prevalent among those groups that are the target of government crackdowns and/or exist on the hinterlands of state control. A related, necessary transformation ingredient is the presence of identity entrepreneurs and organizational access to resources. Infamous yet skilled men like Khudoiberidzev or Namangani lead the most successful groups. Access to financial resources, principally through illegal activities, is the glue that binds. Religion or shared ethnicity may be an important aspect of group identity and objectives, but money keeps mercenaries and drug traffickers coming back. Sugar daddies, like Saudi Arabia or bin Laden, are also essential to sustained levels of activity.

Third, regional VNSAs break the Trinitarian mold. They operate on the margins of the political system and do always seek political goals. Militant religious movements do seek the creation of an Islamic republic, and Karakalpaks may pursue self-determination. On the other hand, regional governments will likely argue with some degree of credibility that religion and ethnicity may be convenient facades for less noble objectives. Warlords and TCOs are the real predators, pursuing wealth and localized power often for its own sake. All of these groups take advantage of

globalization, capitalizing on global commodity markets and the easy anonymity of international money and information transfers.

Fourth, the asymmetric application of violence reigns. Violent crime, terrorism, guerrilla operations, and even conventional attacks are all employed, often simultaneously. Robust weapons smuggling, fed mostly by monies from the illegal trade in drugs, enables VNSAs to pose a real, immediate challenge to the thin conventional forces of regional states. To date, force application has been concentrated in the Ferghana Valley and Tajikistan; however, the threat of violence is spreading like a cancer. It is not uncommon to hear residents as far north as Almaty, Kazakhstan, express concerns about the Wahabis of Afghanistan.

The full-range of VNSA types and tactics have the potential to emerge in Central Asia. In many cases, such as the IMU, the non-state actor is engaged in violent activity and warrants the label. In other cases like the Uighars of Kyrgyzstan, an organization exists and is actively pursuing its goals, but has yet to embrace the use of physical force. Some non-state actors, including the Tajiks of Samarkand and the residents of Khiva, already assign loyalty to a non-state identity, but city-state groups have yet to organize. In addition to recognizing the spectrum of identity-based awareness and activity, our analysis appreciates the overlap of VNSA tactics and types. The IMU, for example, is a militant religious movement engaged in transnational criminal activity that relies on violent crime, guerrilla operations, and terrorism to further its agenda. As in the popular Uzbek video, the morning sun breaks along the Silk Route, wakening us to a potential host of nonconforming threats.

VIOLENT FUTURE

Almaty Dispatch: *Muscular, snow-capped peaks of the Zailiysky Alatau Range frame the former capital of Kazakhstan.*

Thick green blankets of trees shroud the wide boulevards and mask the graying Soviet architecture. As day turns to night, streets darken and a new breed of citizen emerges. In a rougher version of American Graffiti, teenagers with bottles of vodka in hand recline on old Chevys under the only street lamp. Shouting precedes a scuffle that urges us to quicken the pace. Turning the corner, several too-young women huddle outside an old apartment building while a gray-haired, slovenly man limps back and forth between bars seeking customers for their flesh. Nearing the hotel, a police car stops abruptly in our path. Almaty is different than Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where we experienced shakedowns by local thugs posing as cops in broad daylight. In Almaty, real police wait until darkness descends before engaging in extortion. With wallets and passports secure, we enter the lobby for our last night along the Silk Route.

At the most fundamental level, we have been telling a story; creating a credible narrative that links the desperation of individuals like the teenagers and prostitutes of Almaty with the prosperity of violent groups. To this end, we premier an open systems analytical framework that provides explanatory and possibly predicative insight to the relationships most likely to foster an environment in which ripe populations are mobilized into VNSAs. We contend that the most salient underlying causes are at the sub-state level: resource scarcity, demographic pressures, socio-economic deprivation, and organized crime and corruption. Rather than applying these roots of violence to conflict between states, we adapt them for explanatory purposes to understanding collective violence by non-state actors. They are sub-national and often transnational forces impacting individuals in a manner that leads to increasing cynicism, desperation, and even anger.

But this is only the beginning of our story. The dispossessed along the Silk Route will remain isolated in their anger until they are mobilized. The transformation is a function of state failure and identity mobilization. The state fails them when it is unable to

provide very basic services like education and employment. The state also fails when it responds to their hostility with excessive coercive force. Should the state prove capable of meeting fundamental needs, we expect the prospects for VNSA formation to diminish significantly.

State failure is still insufficient without existing identity cleavages. That is, there must be some pre-existent identity groups to absorb the wandering loyalty and respond to the needs of the individual. These cleavages are generally quite shallow until exacerbated by a charismatic leader, or identity entrepreneur, who also has the resources to establish and sustain an organization. This approach rejects primordial views of identity espoused by global chaos theorists, which see identity cleavages as the underlying source of conflict. Rather, we embrace an ascriptive view of identity, which asserts that it is more often the tool of nationalists. It tends to characterize the violence when a charismatic leader successfully changes minor differences into major ones.²⁰⁶ State failure and identity mobilization are thus the engines of change that spawn VNSAs.

The persistence of conflicts involving groups like Al-Queda, Abu Sayyaf, and Somalia warlords suggests the need to understand VNSAs and appreciate their sophistication. Their organizational structure, recruiting strategies, financial methods, and unconventional operations are at odds with the Western approach to conflict. As a result, basic socio-political constructs like war, coercion, and deterrence must be reevaluated. As the current war on terrorism unfolds, we are learning that war does not only involve nation-states employing lethal force to achieve political ends. The battlefield is once again an arena for a range of political entities,

including VNSAs, that may be fighting for post-heroic, apolitical reasons.

As mentioned in the introduction, our framework is in its initial offering. Future research by the authors and others should examine among other issues the internal relationships between the roots of violence, the specific nature of reinforcing actions, the impact of globalization on VNSA character and activities, and the short- and long-term implications of state coercion. Moreover, the predicative aspects of the framework can only be enhanced through the development of specific thresholds, or criteria, for the transformation of an at-risk population. With these long-term projects in mind, we close with prospects for future violence in Central Asia and policy considerations.

Prospects

Multiple significant trends intersect in Central Asia—decolonization (from Soviet rule), religious revival, drug trafficking, weapons trading, globalization, and a general decline of state power all have a considerable imprint in the five Republics. Some of these trends are not new—drugs and weapons traveled the Silk Route hundreds of years ago. Other trends have no parallel in history, such as the way societies are being transformed through the forces of globalization. Furthermore, the introduction of US forces and the recently heightened cooperation between the Central Asian Republics and the US are both historic firsts. Unlike other parts of the world, which either benefit from these trends or at least can contain their ill effects, the Central Asia Republics are facing an increasingly difficult struggle to maintain their territorial sovereignty, stability, and indeed, even long-term existence. Do the political structures in Central Asia have the wherewithal to

accommodate and coopt substate actors in the region? Our preliminary analysis with this nascent model suggests that in the short term, it is possible; however, the medium-term and long-term prognoses are not nearly as optimistic.

In the short term, many potential VNSAs will be stymied by the twin actions of increased US aid to the various governments in the region and decreased support from abroad. For example, US and Northern Alliance successes in Afghanistan probably decimated the IMU; indeed, even as this paper was being edited, media reports suggest Juma Namangani was killed from wounds received in the battle for Mazar-i-Sharif.²⁰⁷ The collapse of the Taliban and weakening of the Al Qaeda network will certainly reduce training, resources, and inspiration to potential radical Islamic VNSAs throughout Central Asia, thus making their incubation less likely. Furthermore, world opinion, now solidly against terrorist groups of any sort, will act as a general damper for the sorts of activities that would incubate VNSAs, and states are more likely to provide necessary resources to deal with any potential uprisings.²⁰⁸

The resulting dampening effects will give states the opportunity and time to increase their accommodation capacity or actually deal with root problems that have caused many substate actors to take the first steps towards becoming full-fledged VNSAs. The history of these states, however, suggests that instead of doing so, they will divert these resources towards strengthening their coercive capabilities, which in the short term will prevent VNSA incubation.

Over the medium to long term, governments supporting the US effort in Afghanistan should expect to be targeted by those sympathetic to the Taliban and Al Qaeda's cause. Disaffected groups opposed to Western influence will be easily mobilized

against those supportive governments simply because of such cooperation. Former President Anwar Sadat provides a chilling example—he was assassinated for making peace with Israel. Will Uzbek President Islam Karimov share a similar fate at the hands of a surviving IMU cell five years from now? While we hesitate to make an assessment of future IMU military capabilities in this time of fluid military activities, we are confident the desire to conduct such an operation will persist.

A variety of other factors becomes important when making 5-10 year assessments. Population increases, water shortages, continued economic decay, deaths of elites (which is likely in the case of Turkmenistan's president), and the resulting succession struggles all factor into VNSA mobilization. Of these previous factors, we view succession issues resulting from the deaths of the Republic's presidents as the greatest possible trigger for an accelerated transformational process. None of the five Central Asian Republics has a well-developed system in place to provide for leadership succession or transfer of power; what laws that have been passed have all already been broken by the current presidents in order to maintain power. Leadership transition in these Republics will not just be a transfer of political power; it will be a transfer of economic power, due as much to corruption as it is to the secondary wealth effects of having political power. As such, the struggle for power will be quite bitter with potential VNSAs as players in the struggle. TCOs, for example, will have an obvious stake in who is president in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Ethnic groups will be especially wary of who will be the next president in Tajikistan.

As our framework suggests, the structural problems will not by themselves cause a VNSA to emerge; rather, such conditions simply set the state for the possibility. Once potential identity entrepreneurs emerge, VNSA incubation becomes more likely. Who these identity entrepreneurs will be or where they will come from is an issue of great importance when applying this model to Central Asia.

Policy

Our framework also provides policy direction, with economic development as a central issue. Economic development in Central Asia obviously is important—with VNSAs (especially smuggling and organized crime organizations) offering employment to disaffected youth who have no other income alternatives, it is imperative that economic alternatives be created. With a “youth bulge” just approaching employment age, hundreds of thousands of jobs are needed. Policy should be focused on programs that encourage job growth, equality of economic opportunity, and a merit-based economy vice cronyism or nepotism.

Along these lines, the obvious bright spot for Central Asia is oil and natural gas exploration and exploitation. This can be a double-edged sword, as the case of oil exploration and development in Nigeria suggests. Due to the government of Nigeria’s neglect and certain policy failures on the part of the oil MNCs in the region, Nigeria’s population lives on approximately a dollar a day, despite the several hundreds of billions of dollars of oil extracted.²⁰⁹ Regardless of who is to blame for Nigeria’s economic state, the economic disparity that exists despite the oil exploitation has given rise to all levels of conflict—from petty theft to sabotaging pipelines and refineries, and to guerilla operations in the case of the

Ogoni tribe. Such a situation—conflict between MNCs and local citizens—can not be allowed to develop in Central Asia; given that the political environment there is so conducive to violence, poverty in the face of billions of dollars of oil wealth will certainly be a rallying cry VNSAs can use to mobilize frustrated citizens. MNCs engaged in oil exploration together with the Central Asian governments must ensure development across the population—jobs must be provided, schools and roads must be built, the environment can not be destroyed, and the individual must not perceive to be a victim of foreign corporations, lest these be the seeds a VNSA later can harvest.

Some precedent exists in Central Asia to suggest that economic development placates potentially restless groups. While the authors were unable to confirm this through independent sources, interviews with businesspersons in Uzbekistan reveal that the Republic of Korea built automobile plants in the Ferghana Valley to prevent the Korean diaspora there from returning to Korea—a policy that thus far seems successful. The point is this—citizens in the Central Asian Republics will be less prone to resort to extreme actions if they have legitimate economic opportunities. While in the case of the Korean diaspora, extreme action would be a mass exodus to the Republic of Korea, extreme action for young Muslims in Tajikistan might include taking up arms against the government—again.

Education is an essential aspect of economic development. More specifically, the state must offer educational options other than mudrassahs. Educational opportunities in Central Asia are few. Many of the students with whom we spoke had some level of education abroad. However, the poignant issue here is that there are few educational opportunities available to young Central Asian

citizens. Indeed, education seems to be in decline in the region, as illustrated by Turkmenbashi's decision to reduce the number of mandatory years of education for Turkmen children.²¹⁰ As another example, Islam Karimov recently stated the number of Uzbek college students studying in Turkey needed to be reduced and that Turkish colleges in Uzbekistan needed to be closed.²¹¹

Political reform is also essential. The number of outlets through which individuals can voice discontent must also be increased, while simultaneously increasing the number of access points to the government. As with providing economic alternatives to poor citizens, policies which aim at providing political alternatives to violence weaken the ability of VNSAs to recruit. Policies should encourage the continued growth of NGOs in Central Asia, while pushing for top-heavy central governments to allow legitimate local levels of government to grow both in size and responsibility/authority. Central Asian governments must realize such moves will make their governments much more pliable, and therefore much more survivable.

Complementing political reform must be efforts to professionalize government bureaucracies. As repeatedly mentioned in this paper, each of the presidents of these Republics is simply the former Communist party chief prior to the break-up of the Soviet Union. There exists no tradition in democratic values, respect for human rights, the political necessity of an economic middle class, or a government responsive to its citizens. Islam Karimov's recent decision to make himself "president for life," coupled with Turkmenbashi's similar decision last year, only points out how ossified and unresponsive these governments are

becoming. A government that continues to feed its citizenry's disillusionment will eventually become vulnerable.

Reforms must also come in the law enforcement, judicial, and banking sectors. Citizens must believe their governments are essentially fair in economic and judicial realms—without citizens believing in those core functions, trust in government will not develop. Without such trust, warlords will continue to triumph along the Silk Route.

NOTES

¹ NGO growth data from Charles W. Kegley and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *World Politics: Trend and Transformation* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001), 174.

² *Ibid.*, 435.

³ Martin van Creveld provides a compelling examination of the Clausewitzian Trinity and its implications for our understanding of total war in *The Transformation of War* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1991), 35-42.

⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1979), 73.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶ Recounted in Ferghana Valley Working Group of the Center for Preventive Action, Sam Nunn, Barnett Rubin, and Nancy Lubin, *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia* (New York, NY: Century Foundation Press, 1999), 49-51.

⁷ Michael T. Klare, "Redefining Security: The New Global Schisms," *Current History* (November 1996): 353, highlights several of the leading "stresses" on human security.

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- ²⁰⁸ "New US Aid for Central Asia, Russia," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 2001. Available on-line at <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-000080003oct07.column?coll=la-headlines-business>. As of 27 November 2001.
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- ²¹⁰ Interview, USDAT, June 2000.
- ²¹¹ Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan news summaries. Available on-line at http://uzland.narod.ru/2000/10_21.htm, As of 27 January 2002.
